DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 466 818 EA 031 763

AUTHOR	Abdal-Haqq, Ismat, Ed.
TITLE	Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology: A School Leader's Guide. Technology Leadership Network Special Report.
INSTITUTION	National School Boards Association, Alexandria, VA. Inst. for the Transfer of Technology to Education.
ISBN	ISBN-0-88364-256-5
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	78p.; A publication of the National School Board Associations ITTE: Education Technology Programs.
AVAILABLE FROM	National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3493 (Order no. 03-151-44W; $28 members; $35 nonmembers; bulk discount). Tel: 703-838-6722; Tel: 800-706-6722 (Toll Free); Fax: 703-683-7590; Web site: http://www.nsba.org.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Involvement; Community Resources; *Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Outreach Programs; *School Community Relationship

ABSTRACT

Families and communities can be valuable allies for professional educators and policymakers working to ensure high levels of student achievement. This publication emphasizes the use of technology to develop sustainable approaches and strategies that fit into a coordinated, comprehensive, and coherent family and community engagement program. It presents concepts and issues, and supplements discussions with practical guidelines; sample tools, such as checklists and surveys; and examples of technology-based outreach activities from actual schools and districts. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the body of research that supports the positive linkage between family and community involvement and high-achieving students and schools. Chapter 2 reports the results of a pilot project developed and managed by the National School Boards Foundation: Xchange: Strengthening Schools through Board Discussions. Chapter 3 looks at the potential for computer-mediated communications to create broad-based learning communities that bring parents, schools, and community members together to advance the interests of students. Chapter 4 consists of an annotated collection of electronic and print resources. The appendices feature a sample parent-involvement policy, lessons in Web site building learned by one district, and guidelines on how to avoid school and district liability for illegal or inappropriate Web site activities. (Contains 58 references.)(RT)

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Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology: A School Leader's Guide

An ITTE Technology Leadership network Special Report

A Publication of the National School Boards Associations ITTE: Education Technology Programs

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Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology

Ismat Abdal-Haqq
Editor

A Technology Leadership Network Special Report

ITTE: Education Technology Programs
NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
Alexandria, Virginia

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Printed in the United States of America
International Standard Book Number: 0-88364-256-5

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Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology may be ordered online (http://www.nsba.org/publications.htm) or from the NSBA Distribution Center, 1-800-706-6722, order # 03-151-44. Single copy: $28 members (Technology Leadership Network, National Affiliates); $35 (non-members). Bulk discounts available.

Cite as:
Abdal-Haqq, I. ed. 2002. *Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

Editor:	Ismat Abdal-Haqq, NSBA
Cover Art & Design:	WM Graphics, Washington, DC
Production Manager:	Gerry Freiert, NSBA

Dear Education Leader:

NSBA is pleased to present *Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology*, which addresses the critical issue of family and community engagement in the work of schools and how school leaders can use technology to promote and support that engagement.

This guide provides an overview of the decades of research documenting the positive effects of family involvement on student achievement, as well as more recent investigations that suggest a need to situate family involvement programs within the broader context of community engagement. Concrete examples from several schools and districts, including NSBA's Technology Leadership Network member districts, illustrate how familiar and emerging technologies are being used to promote family and community outreach and engagement.

Technology coordinators, building administrators, family and community involvement specialists, and superintendents can benefit from the information and resources in these pages. This book also supports the Key Work of School Boards, developed by NSBA and its Federation Members as a framework that school boards can use to improve student achievement through community engagement.

Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology is the latest publication from NSBA's ITTE: Education Technology Programs (ITTE), which sponsor publications, meetings, site visits, electronic communities, Web sites, and conferences to promote constructive and responsible use of education technology. Almost 500 school districts in the United States and Canada participate in ITTE's Technology Leadership Network.

We hope that you will call on NSBA and ITTE for additional resources to help you utilize technology to promote student learning and support the work of school boards, administrators, and practitioners.

Sincerely,

Mossi W. White
President, NSBA

Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director, NSBA

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The National School Boards Association is the nationwide organization representing public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education through school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to state associations of school boards and local school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of grassroots democracy. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community—to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of associations of school boards across the United States and its territories. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members that govern 14,890 local school districts serving the nation's more than 47 million public school students. Virtually all school board members are elected; the rest are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members. The 25-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA executive director and a 150-person staff. NSBA is located in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

NSBA's Programs and Services

- **National Affiliate Program** – enables school boards to work with their state association and NSBA to identify and influence federal and national trends and issues affecting public school governance.
- **Council of Urban Boards of Education** – serves the governance needs of urban school boards.
- **Large District Forum** – serves the governance needs of large but non-urban boards.
- **Rural and Small District Forum** – serves the governance needs of rural and small enrollment districts.
- **Federal Relations Network** – school board members from each congressional district actively participate in NSBA's federal and national advocacy efforts.
- **Federal Policy Coordinators Network** – focuses on the administration of federally funded programs.
- **Award Winning Publications** – ***American School Board Journal, School Board News***, and special substantive reports on public school governance throughout the year.
- **ITTE: Education Technology Programs and Technology Leadership Network** – advance public education through best uses of technology in the classroom and school district operations.
- **Council of School Attorneys** – focuses on school law issues and services to school board attorneys.
- **Annual Conference and Exposition** – the nation's largest policy and training conference for local education officials on national and federal issues affecting the public schools in the United States.
- **National Education Policy Network** – provides the latest policy information nationwide and a framework for public governance through written policies.
- **Research/Training/Development and Resource Exchange Network** – meetings, clearinghouses, online learning, and consulting services to develop leadership of state school boards associations and local school boards.

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About NSBA's ITTE: Education Technology Programs

The National School Boards Association established ITTE: Education Technology Programs (formerly known as the Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education) in 1985 to advance the wise and appropriate use of technology in public education. The Technology Leadership Network, a major component of ITTE, was created in 1986 to help school districts share in dialogue about technology in education.

Special reports such as this one are among the benefits of participation in the Technology Leadership Network. The newsletter *Technology Leadership News*, the annual Technology + Learning Conference, site visits to exemplary school districts, topical meetings, an e-mail list, and online courses are some of the additional opportunities.

For information on events, activities, publications, and almost 500 school districts participating in the Technology Leadership Network, see ITTE's Web site, www.nsba.org/itte, or contact the ITTE staff at NSBA, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 838-6722, e-mail: itte@nsba.org.

Contents

Introduction ix

Chapter 1

Engaging Families and Communities in the Work of Schools: Issues and Technology-based Tool 1
Ismat Abdal-Haqq, National School Boards Association

- What Is Family and Community Engagement? 2
- Why Is Family and Community Involvement Important? 5
- National Trends 6
- Barriers to Family and Community Participation 7
- How Does Technology Help Schools Connect to Families and Communities? 8
- Technology-based Tools 10

Chapter 2

Electronic Tools to Help School Boards Reach Out to Parents and Communities 23
Kathy McGuigan, National School Boards Foundation

- A Tool to Inform and Engage 24
- Implementing Xchange in Local Communities 26
- Xchange Components 27
- Organizing Information 29
- Readiness Assessment 33
- Computer Assessment 35
- School District Marketing Plan 38

Chapter 3

Electronic Communities: Supporting Public Engagement 41
Carol M. Hotz and Gerald D. Bailey, Kansas State University at Manhattan

- Developing Learning Organizations 41
- Electronic Communities 42
- Tips for Planning and Implementing Electronic Communities 44

Chapter 4

Resources 51

Appendix 1

Parent Involvement Policy Statement 59
San Diego City Schools

Appendix 2

One District's Approach to Building a Better Web Site 60
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (N.C.)

Appendix 3

School Web Sites and Freedom of Expression Issues 63

NSBA Education Technology Publications 65

Introduction

Families and communities can be valuable allies to professional educators and policymakers working to ensure high levels of achievement for public school students. The positive impact of family involvement in their children's education is well-documented. Researchers and practitioners are also beginning to appreciate how the intricate web of community relationships in which children and families participate can influence student achievement as well.

This publication, *Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology*, helps P-12 administrators, practitioners, and policymakers integrate computer and other technologies into their family and community outreach programs. The information and resources included in these pages will be useful for technology coordinators, teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, and parent/community outreach specialists. In addition the book includes valuable resources and illustrations from the world of practice for preservice educators and staff developers.

Throughout the guide, discussion of concepts and issues is supplemented by practical guidelines; sample tools, such as checklists and surveys; and examples of technology-based outreach activities from actual schools and districts. The emphasis is on using technology to develop sustainable approaches and strategies that fit into a coordinated, comprehensive, and coherent family and community engagement program.

> ***"Ongoing communication activities are critical to building and maintaining a relationship with stakeholders. If communication with the public is only a priority when there is a financial need or a crisis, it should be no surprise that distrust and suspicion is the result. Too often organizations find that 'love me suddenly' doesn't work. For school districts this is especially apparent during referendum campaigns or school crisis. Ongoing communication and community involvement do not require a school board to 'sell' a building plan or decision. Ongoing, effective communication works to discover community priorities, community needs, and the level of community support for various options before the question is placed on the ballot."***
>
> Wisconsin School Public Relations Association
> http://www.nspra.org/main_schoolpr.htm#whyyouneed

Chapter 1, "Engaging Families and Communities in the Work of Schools: Issues and Technology-based Tools," provides an overview of the substantial body of research that supports the positive linkage between family and community involvement and high-achieving students and schools. It looks at some common barriers to parent and community engagement and considers ways in which computer and other technologies can be employed to overcome the barriers. The chapter includes many examples of technology-based tools and strategies at work in schools and districts across the nation. Several of the featured districts are members of NSBA's Technology Leadership Network.

Chapter 2, "Electronic Tools to Help School Boards Reach Out to Parents and Communities," reports the results of a pilot project developed and managed by the National School Boards Foundation: Xchange: Strengthening Schools through Board Discussions. In that project, five school districts worked together over a two-year period to create and test Web-based tools to facilitate family and community involvement.

Chapter 3, "Electronic Communities: Supporting Public Engagement," looks at the potential for computer-mediated communications to create broad-based learning communities that bring parents, schools, and community members together to advance the interests of students.

The final chapter consists of an annotated collection of electronic and print resources. The appendices feature a sample parent involvement policy, lessons in Web site building learned by one district, and guidelines on how to avoid school and district liability for illegal or inappropriate Web site activities.

Chapter

Engaging Families and Communities in the Work of Schools: Issues and Technology-based Tools

Ismat Abdal-Haqq
National School Boards Association

The noted educator Ernest Boyer observed, "It is my conviction that you cannot have an island of academic excellence in a sea of community indifference *(For the Best Results,* 2000*)*." Guarding against this indifference, and reversing it where it does exist, is an important and challenging responsibility for public schools today.

This chapter provides an overview of what research and practice reveals about the effects and significance of family and community involvement in public education; outlines common barriers to involvement; offers guidelines for developing productive family and community engagement programs; and gives examples of how schools are using various technologies to support family participation and community engagement efforts.

In the discussion, parent and family participation or involvement is considered within the broader context of community engagement because of a growing consensus that schools need the support of both parents and nonparents if they are to secure the resources and support needed to provide a world-class education for all students and if they are to maximize the resources they do secure *(Reasons for Hope,* 1998*)*.

> ***"It is my conviction that you cannot have an island of academic excellence in a sea of community indifference."***
>
> Ernest L. Boyer

Some researchers estimate that in the average community, only 24 percent of adults have children enrolled in local public schools (Cunningham, 2002). As the population ages, the need for health and social services for older citizens will increase, and this trend may have significant implications for public school funding. In an address given at the National School Boards Association's annual meeting in 2001, former Secretary of Education Richard Riley warned, "Looming ahead of us may be increasing competition for public dollars between those trying to improve public education and those seeking more support for the elderly. This is a competition we need to avoid at all costs. School board members need to think creatively about how to develop new alliances with senior citizens in order to improve public education."

What Is Family and Community Engagement?

One of the most widely accepted models for structuring family and community involvement programs was developed by Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, based at Johns Hopkins University. Epstein's framework, which contains six categories of activities or "types of involvement," is designed as a guide for schools, but she emphasizes the importance of employing practices within each category that reflect local conditions and needs (Epstein, et al., 1997).

- **Parenting**—activities that focus on helping to improve parenting skills and assisting parents in setting home conditions that support student needs. This category also includes helping schools to understand the families from which their students come.
- **Communicating**—activities that involve two-way communication between schools and families about school programs and student progress
- **Volunteering**—activities that address and improve recruitment, training, scheduling, and other concerns that affect family and community participation as volunteers for school programs or attendees at school functions
- **Learning at home**—activities that involve families in students' homework and other curriculum-linked learning activities at home. Activities in this category help parents to help students.
- **Decision making**—activities that bring families into the governance and decision making process
- **Collaborating with the community**—activities that involve working with public and private agencies and groups to secure resources and services for schools, students, and families and to provide services to the community

A recent synthesis of research on family and community connections to schools, published by the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools (NCFCC), revealed lack of consistent agreement among practitioners, researchers, and school, family, and community stakeholders about the meaning of "connections," "parent involvement," or "community involvement" (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002, p. 7). Clarifying definitions will make it easier to "implement and measure the impacts of these connections," according to the report.

Rethinking family and community engagement

Many educators consider it especially important to reexamine and expand conventional notions of parent or community involvement to take into account the diverse cultural and economic communities from which students come. Educators and politicians frequently lament the seemingly low levels of parent involvement seen in some low-income, immigrant, or minority communities; however, it may be that within these communities, forms of family and community support for student success exist that are being disregarded.

In a study of successful parent involvement programs in schools with large migrant student populations, Lopez, Scribner, and Mahtivanichcha (2001, pp. 256-257) found that "current parental involvement policies and practices still privilege... 'mainstream' involvement forms." Also, at times, there is a disconnect between what professional educators consider to be "involved" parents and what some parents believe. According to the study, school staffs tend to define parental involvement as participating in organized activities (such as parent advisory groups or intervention programs that provide training, instructions, or materials to

perform instructional tasks in the home. However, " parents—particularly marginalized parents—view their contributions to school success in terms of informal activities such as providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with their children, sending them to school clean and rested, checking homework, and a variety of other nontraditional activities." Parents who do not participate in expected avenues of parental involvement may be labeled "uninvolved" and judged incapable of providing an adequate learning environment in their homes. The study's authors concluded that such interpretations perpetuate stereotypes that further impede productive communication between families and schools.

Sonia Nieto's (1992) classic case studies of successful adolescent students from diverse backgrounds produced similar conclusions about the need for educators to expand conventional definitions of parent and family involvement. Very few of the parents volunteered for school activities, attended meetings, or visited schools on a consistent basis. Nor did they provide regular homework help, take their children to museums and libraries, or similar activities. Nieto (1992, p. 264) found that the families of the successful students in the study were involved but in ways that do not always register on standard measures, leading her to advocate a more inclusive definition of parent involvement that considers "intangible" home activities, such as "consistent communication, high expectation, pride, understanding, and enthusiasm for their children's school experiences."

Types of Family Connections with Schools

The following categories of family-school connections were found in the literature review commissioned by the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools.

- Homework help and home practices—includes parent training developed or provided by schools to help parents support student learning in specific subjects and practices such as reading to students at home to boost literacy
- Supportive home environments
- Home-school communication and interaction
- Parent participation in activities at school—includes meetings and volunteering for classroom activities, field trips, etc.
- Tutoring by parents in school-sponsored tutorial programs
- Emotional and academic support and communication of high expectations, pride, and confidence in student's abilities
- Out-of-school enrichment activities, such as museum visits or private tutoring, initiated by parents
- Advice and guidance from family members about academic decisions and discussions and interactions between students and their families about school-related issues and activities
- Parents acting as role models and reinforcing the value of education
- Family participation in school reform efforts, development of improvement plans, and other activities associated with or resulting from school change actions

Source: Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections. Annual Synthesis 2001. 2002. Catherine Jordan, Evangelina Orozco, & Amy Averett. Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. http://www.sedl.org/connections.

The NCFCC report revealed a range of activities that connect families and communities to schools (see sidebars "Types of Family Connections with Schools" and "Types of Community Connections with Schools"). According to NCFCC, this range of activities reflects an evolution in thinking about the school-family-community relationship.

> Much of the emerging theory and practice of family and community connections with schools encourages a rethinking of our understanding of how children develop and how the various people and contexts fit together to support that development. A new orientation is emerging in the field, from a school-centric focus toward the creation of reciprocal connections among schools, parents, and community members. These connections are mutually beneficial and reflect the shared goals of all stakeholders. (Jordan, et al., 2002, p. 14)

Types of Community Connections with Schools

The following categories of community-school connections were found in the literature review commissioned by the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools.

- School-based or school-linked health and human services, which use school facilities and resources to coordinate service delivery to students and community members by local health and social service providers
- Initiatives that link career training, life experiences, and academic content, such as school-to-work programs
- After-school programs that use school facilities and resources to provide remediation, enrichment, and day care
- Reform initiatives that are community-driven and have interrelated targets, such as local school improvement and citizen empowerment and capacity-building
- School-business partnerships that bring to schools equipment, expertise, volunteers, or funds
- Connections with community, cultural, and educational organizations that provide enrichment activities and opportunities for informal teaching and learning
- School-university partnerships and collaborations
- Support from individual community members to individual students or the general student population
- Service-learning or community service programs
- Programs that provide tutoring and academic support by volunteers from the community
- Formal participation by community members in school decision making through mechanisms such as school governance councils

Source: Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections. Annual Synthesis 2001. 2002. Catherine Jordan, Evangelina Orozco, & Amy Averett. Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. http://www.sedl.org/connections.

Why Is Family and Community Involvement Important?

In a 1998 report produced for the U.S. Department of Education's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, investigators concluded that more than 30 years of public and private research had confirmed "a positive connection between family involvement and student success."

> Different types of family involvement produce different gains at all grade and age levels, but a family's form of involvement is not as important as the variety and amount. The most accurate predictors of student achievement are not income or social status, but the extent to which families:
>
> - create a home environment that encourages learning;
> - express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and
> - become involved in their children's learning in school and in the community. (Otterbourg, 1998, p. 14)

Furthermore, some researchers have found that when parents are involved in sufficient numbers, academic indicators, such as grades and test scores, improve for the school as a whole (Cooper, 1999).

The importance of family and community involvement in the life of schools was demonstrated in a recent study of student success and minority student achievement in Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001). Investigators found that the average academic performance (as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress) of all DoDEA students was high, but the performance of African American and Hispanic students in these schools was among the highest in the nation. In addition, there was a significantly smaller gap between minority and nonminority achievement when DoDEA schools were compared to schools in the states. While recognizing that the accomplishments of these schools rest on a combination of internal and external factors, the researchers and DoDEA teachers and administrators attribute their success, in part, to strong parent and community involvement and support.

> DoDEA schools reflect an elevated "corporate commitment" from the U.S. military that is both material and symbolic. This commitment includes an expectation of parent involvement in school- and home-based activities (e.g., soldiers are instructed that their "place of duty" is at their child's school on parent-teacher conference day, and are relieved of work responsibilities to role in education far surpasses the level of investment or involvement found in most mentoring/tutoring models [of business involvement in schools]. (Smrekar, et al., 2001, p. vii)

The NCFCC research review found many studies documenting positive impact in several areas and for various stakeholders (Jordan, et al., 2001):

Outcomes for students

- Academic achievement
- Other school-related achievement (e.g., attendance; lower retention and dropout rates)
- Social functioning (e.g., behavior, motivation, teacher and peer relationships)

- Barriers to learning (e.g., access to health and social services through school-linked services)
- Networks of support (e.g., "social networks within and between neighborhoods can provide a web of support to parents and other adults that leads to greater learning opportunities for youth and children" [p. 18].)
- New learning opportunities (e.g., new learning sites, such as community organizations and after-school programs, and access to work- or career-based learning opportunities.)

Outcomes for schools

- School reform—parents and community members as advocates, partners, or participants in reform initiatives
- School climate
- Access to resources and knowledge
- Curriculum development and greater instructional capacity

Outcomes for families and communities

- Skill and knowledge enhancement and changes in beliefs and attitudes about schools and education
- Resource and service acquisition by community organizations and families
- Greater civic capacity and community development

National Trends

Over the last decade, attention to parent, family, and community involvement in schools has increased, heavily influenced by three events. In addition to stimulating interest and elevating family involvement to a national priority, these events shaped views about what constitutes family and community involvement.

Title I

The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and placed greater demands than in the past, on schools and districts that receive Title I funds to adopt specific strategies for developing school-family partnerships. In 1994-1995, these requirements would have applied to roughly 11,900 of the more than 13,200 school districts in the U.S. at that time (personal communication, National Center for Education Statistics, May 2002).

Title I funds support programs that seek to improve educational outcomes for low-achieving children. The strategies required under IASA focused on parent involvement in school- and district-level policy making; joint school and family responsibility for high academic achievement; and developing the capacity of schools and parents to engage in productive mutual collaboration. Specifically, Title I requires that schools:

- Provide to parents information and training related to their children's education, including the state's content and performance standards, as well as assessment procedures

- Involve parents in planning and decision making related to implementing Title I programs
- Make available assistance and support, including literacy-related assistance when necessary, to enable parents to work with their children at home and to participate in planning and decision making
- Develop written parent involvement policies
- Develop, with parents, school-parent compacts that lay out parent and school responsibilities for helping students to achieve at a high level (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997)

Congress reauthorized ESEA in 2001 when it passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law by President Bush in January 2002. At present, the Department of Education is taking comment on proposed rules for various programs, and it is unclear if or how the parent involvement provisions of Title I will be affected.

Goals 2000

The second important event during the 1990s that promoted attention to parental and family involvement was passage of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, which added two new goals to the original list of six national education goals. Goal 8, parental participation, said: "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" *(Goal 8: Parental Participation,* 1998*)*. Related actions included the formation, by former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (http://pfie.ed.gov/) and the establishment of state parental information and resource centers.

National standards for parent and family involvement programs

The third nationally influential event was development of National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs by the National PTA in 1997 (National Standards, 1998). The six standards build upon the six types of parent involvement identified by Epstein. The National PTA's standards are often used by schools and districts to guide development and implementation of local parent and family involvement policies.

Barriers to Family and Community Participation

To boost family and community involvement, education leaders should consider strategies for overcoming barriers to participation. Some common barriers cited by researchers *(Family Involvement in Education,* 1998*; Reaching Out to Others,* 1998*)* include:

- Meetings, conferences, and volunteer opportunities are scheduled during work hours or at other inconvenient times.
- Transportation is not available or convenient.
- Parents and members of the public don't know how to participate—what needs to be done; who is the contact person; what are the options for participation.
- Parents and other citizens may feel intimidated, scorned, or held in contempt by school staff, particularly where there are real or perceived socioeconomic differences.

- Both parents and nonparents often feel they have nothing to contribute. Researchers have found such feelings become more acute as children progress to the secondary level.
- Some parents and nonparents believe that the work of schools should be left to the "professionals."
- Schools may project an unwelcoming, even hostile, attitude toward parents and other "outsiders," viewing with suspicion behavior that seems to question or "interfere" with the professionals. Although they profess to want and value family and community participation, often schools only want involvement on their own terms.
- Language and cultural differences are major barriers in some areas.
- Parents may not understand the system, how decisions are made, etc.

How Does Technology Help Schools Connect to Families and Communities?

Family and community engagement programs are most effective when they are employed as one strategy in a constellation of coordinated strategies a school or district uses to ensure that all students achieve at high levels. They are not ends in themselves, but tools that can be applied to the multiple tasks that schools perform. Similarly, schools will achieve better results when they employ contemporary and emerging technologies to facilitate family and community engagement (1) if the technologies complement other strategies and media, and (2) if technology-based engagement and outreach activities fit into a carefully planned family and community engagement program. (See sidebar, "Characteristics of Effective Programs to Connect Schools, Families, and Communities").

According to Blanchard (1997), technology-based tools can support family-school connections in four major ways:

- Communication and information—Technology can help to establish two-way communication between home and school, particularly in cases where distance inhibits easy contact.
- Learning and instruction—Technology can help parents become coaches, instructors, and learning partners.
- Interest and motivation—Technology can connect families to one another, as well as to school personnel, producing broad and varied attention to common problems and issues.
- Resources and Costs—Technology can help to equalize access to resources, information, and learning opportunities for students and families; and reduce related financial, time, and other costs to families and schools.

Marshall and Rossett indicate that technology can enrich the connection between school and home through different kinds of links. Ideally, these links combine to "create an effective, integrated communication and instruction system—all bolstered by technology" (Marshall & Rossett, 1997).

- The **information link** provides general communication to parents and students about what is happening in the school and gives parents and

Characteristics of Effective Programs to Connect Schools, Families, and Communities

- Effective family and community engagement programs are comprehensive and inclusive. They reach out to all parents and offer a number of participation options: teacher, supporter, advocate, and decision maker.
- Effective family and community engagement programs are well-planned and systematic. They have defined goals, clearly communicate expectations for all participants, and provide training and orientation for educators, families, and community members to enable them to meet expectations.
- Effective family and community engagement programs are long-term and embedded in the overall educational program.
- Effective family and community engagement programs allocate adequate resources to strengthen school programs, student learning, and positive family practices.
- Effective family and community engagement programs ensure regular, two-way, and substantive communication between schools and families and between schools and local communities.
- Effective family and community engagement programs have written policies.
- Effective family and community engagement programs have administrative support, which provides material resources and personnel to implement program activity.
- Effective family and community engagement programs employ a partnership approach—school staff, families, and community members work together to plan, set goals, and implement the program.
- Effective family and community engagement programs share resources and information and learn from other programs.
- Effective family and community engagement programs incorporate ongoing assessment and evaluation.
- Effective family and community engagement programs do not "confuse public engagement with constituency building" (Public Agenda, 2001).
- Effective family and community engagement programs make sure that teachers and other school-based educators are consistently involved, in meaningful ways, in planning and implementing programs.

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caretakers ideas for contributing to students' educational and social growth. Appropriate topics are those with the broadest possible appeal, from creating an environment conducive to homework to understanding the report card.

- The **coaching link** offers a message targeted to a particular family, group of students, or individual. Information broadcasting can offer general tips to a parent about increasing student confidence or creating a homework nook, but the coaching link allows a teacher to make specific suggestions for combining Maria's language development needs with the arrival of her baby sister, for example, or advising the families of children working on a family history project about the kind of photos most appropriate for the effort.
- The **feedback link** encourages educators and parents to share specific information about a child's performance. A teacher might compliment a child's mastery of tough spelling words, or a father might inquire how his child is doing in the math unit on compound interest. The purpose of the feedback is to ensure better support and instruction for individual students through communications.
- The **instructional link** extends the learning day by bridging the chasm between the home and the classroom. Concepts that can be introduced in class and then practiced at home help students see real-world relevance in what is taught in school. After a unit on weather, for example, a child might work with a parent to follow local weather trends, with the goal of predicting the weather over the holiday break. (Marshall & Rossett, 1997, page A20).

Technology-based Tools

Schools and districts are employing a range of old and new technologies in varied ways to link to parents and nonparents in their local communities.

Radio and television

Schools are using the familiar and widespread media of radio and television to overcome some of the traditional barriers to communicating with parents and communities: language, distance, and scheduling.

- **Alamo Navajo Community School**

Rural Alamo Navajo Community School in Magaleno, New Mexico (http://ayani.alamo.bia.edu/school/alamohome.htm) is located on a Navajo reservation. To help overcome barriers of distance and language (60-65 percent of the professional staff are non-Navajo speakers), the reservation's school board operates a local AM radio station that broadcasts about 70 percent of its programming in Navajo. School staff broadcast announcements about upcoming meetings and events, educational programs for students and adults, interviews with individuals from the school and community, and health-related public service announcements (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997).

- **Radio Ike**

Eisenhower Middle School (http://www.everett.wednet.edu/schools/ middle/ eisenhower) in Everett, Washington is part of Everett Public Schools, a Technology Leadership Network member district. Eisenhower operates Radio Ike, an FM station broadcast over a small, low-powered transmitter. These transmitters do not need Federal Communications Commission broadcast licenses and are used by many schools. The station has a limited range, which includes the school campus and immediate neighborhood; and school buses have Radio Ike, so students can also listen while on the road. Parent reaction has been positive.

Messages, in four-minute loops, are repeated 24 hours a day, and the content can be easily changed at short notice. Schools like Eisenhower use this medium to transmit varied content, including: emergency announcements, reminders about important dates, homework & test preparation tips, volunteer opportunities, school news, directions to events, and upcoming meetings. Eisenhower also communicates with families through a monthly newsletter, given to students and sent by e-mail, but finds Radio Ike reaches some parents that the newsletters don't reach. The transmission systems can be purchased for under $2,000 (Cromwell, 2001).

- **Voces de los Padres/Parent Voices**

For many years, Houston Independent School District's (http://www.houstonisd.org) Media Services Television has cablecast a wide range of educational and informational programming in the Houston (Tex.) area, but the talk show "Voces de los Padres/Parent Voices" (http://dept.houstonisd.org/media/parentsvoices/parent&20voices.htm) is a pilot program launched in 2000-2001. The 2001-2002 program schedule had 13 60-minute segments, airing live twice a month. Six segments were broadcast in Spanish, part of the district's outreach to families of Hispanic students who make up more than 50 percent of the district's student population, which exceeds 210,000.

The program's format consists of a panel of experts engaged in conversation with a live studio audience of parents and callers on topics such as "Dual Language," "Are We Raising a Generation of Couch Potatoes?" and "Volunteers in HISD." Show topics are developed with input from parents, parent representatives, and parent/community involvement practitioners. The goals of the program include enhancing "positive interaction between parents and schools in the district [and]...helping parents to help their children through the learning years." Houston ISD is a Technology Leadership Network member district.

Telephony

Telephony is actually the science of telephones—translating sound into electrical signals, transmitting the signals, then converting them back to sound—but in recent years it has come to be associated with computer hardware and software that combines to perform traditional telephone functions. Voice mail is a common telephony application. Internet telephony refers to hardware and software that enable the Internet to be used as the medium for transmitting telephone calls.

Automated telephone systems (ATS) enable schools to use the telephone to inform and communicate with large numbers of families in a relatively short time span *(Telephone Communication*, n. d.). They are low-cost, allow the caller to remain anonymous, and employ familiar equipment that is in wide use. ATS can:

- Function as a recorded bulletin board giving regularly updated information about meetings, extracurricular activities, and school events
- Supply prerecorded information on district or school programs such as bus schedules, school lunch programs, and magnet schools
- Provide prerecorded information to students, parents, and community members on general topics such as drug abuse, how parents can help their children in school, school rules and regulations, mandatory testing, and volunteer options
- Notify parents about absences and tardiness and capture a response
- Deliver prerecorded messages in different languages

Schools considering automated telephone systems should make sure to disseminate widely to parents and other potential users cards, flyers, brochures, or other convenient listings of phone numbers and menus of prerecorded topics. The recordings should include a telephone number for additional information.

The success of the Transparent School Model (TSM), a system based on voice mail technology, helped to popularize ATS. TSM has been implemented in more than 1,000 schools since it was developed in 1987 by Jerold Bauch at Vanderbilt University. The model has several components. Each day teachers leave short messages, in secure voice mailboxes, providing classroom news, explanations of concepts and content, specific homework assignments, and suggestions for parents. Parents call the school's parent hotline, select the mailbox of their child's teacher, and retrieve the daily message. Parents have the option of leaving a response. The call-out feature allows schools to make automated calls to selected parents on a time-delayed basis. Data collected in a number of studies suggest that implementation of TSM led to significant increases in parent involvement and improvements in student performance and behavior in many schools (Bauch, 1998).

Internet telephony, which enables the Internet to be used as the medium for transmitting telephone calls, has expanded the options for schools seeking a flexible, easy-to-use medium to communicate with parents, alumni, and other community members. (See sidebar, "Internet Telephony Helps Horace Mann Elementary School Improve Outreach Communications")

School board tools

Building administrators and classroom teachers are not alone in using technology to reach out to parents and nonparents in local school communities. School boards are also using computer-based technologies to communicate and build support for the work of schools.

- **New Millennium Leadership Program**

The New Millennium Leadership Program (NMLP) incorporates a Web-based system that lets school board members manage online a variety of governance, policy, and education information. NMLP is "a leadership development program for boards, not a technology program," says Billy Johnson of the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA). GSBA, with support from Apple Computer, developed the program. It's designed to give board members tools to make them more effective and improve the board decision-making process—with the ultimate goal of raising student achievement *(New Millennium,* 2001*)*.

DeKalb County's school board implemented phase one of the program in 2001, and NMLP became available to school boards statewide during the first half of 2002. In May 2001,

Internet Telephony Helps Horace Mann Elementary School Improve Outreach Communications

In September 2001, Dr. Mark Jones, principal of Horace Mann Elementary School in the Beverly Hills Unified School District (Ca.), deployed PACE, a new system to help improve school-to-home outreach communications. PACE, developed by the Partnership for Academic and Community Excellence, delivers outbound voice and data messages to targeted recipients.

The results have been impressive, Jones says. For example, in 2000-2001, before using PACE, Horace Mann, which has an enrollment of about 750 students, received a 10-15 percent return on data cards. After implementing PACE, the schools had a 75-80 percent return rate.

"PACE has improved my communicative access to my parents," Jones reports. "When an important reminder needs to go to parents, I can create that message and send it to all of my parents in about five minutes. Because the message is created by me, I can be assured of its accuracy and delivery. In the past, the strength of a message may have gotten diluted at the end of a parent phone tree or lost in the backpack of a well-meaning child. With PACE, however, I know my message will reach my parents with clarity and efficiency."

According to Jones, the system has dramatically increased parent participation at important events and fundraisers. It enables school personnel to instantly communicate last minute cancellations and school closings to the entire school community. It also keeps the Horace Mann database clean with accurate parent contact information.

The system uses the existing school hardware, wiring, and software infrastructure to provide the basis for an easy-to-use, reliable, and cost-effective communications environment. A telephone and an Internet connection are the only requirements.

Using a simple process, Jones can access the secure PACE Web site and catalog a variety of event-specific messages for immediate or future delivery to his customized audience. First, he records his message in his own voice; then, he selects recipients. For example, he might need to send the message only to parents of students in grades one to three. Finally, he schedules a time and date for delivery. Jones can send the message immediately or schedule delivery five months later. The message will be delivered with results (and feedback) instantly reported.

"My biggest challenge in using PACE is keeping my messages brief. Over time, however, I found that my messages have become more focused and my delivery more succinct," says Jones. "It takes practice, but I have found that creating a good 30-second PACE message paves the way to clear lines of communication with parents. Often parents, like students, are nervous about coming to the principal to communicate. PACE has helped to make me more approachable.

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www.paceamerica.net

GSBA implemented the program for its own board of directors. "We had board members who had never touched a computer before," says Mark Willis, GSBA's controller, "but the important thing is they made a commitment. We also tried to make the training fun." So far, the board has used the system to hold two "paperless board meetings."

School boards interested in joining the New Millennium Leadership Program (www.gsba.com/millennium/) must sign a letter of commitment stating they will participate in professional development, purchase the needed hardware and software, and check e-mail on a regular basis. The superintendent, all members of the board, the board's support staff, and the district's technology director must agree to participate.

The first phase involves acquiring a laptop and printer for each participant and installing and providing Internet and e-mail access. Phase one also includes training on using the technology, roles and responsibilities, board/ superintendent relations, legal issues involving electronic communications, and board management of technology.

Phase two consists of implementing the online "eBoard" program, which includes a "paperless board packet system," a document management system, a school law guide, a policy manual, and information on legislation. GSBA is considering adding a calendar, training materials, and a goals-tracking system.

Thirty-eight districts in Georgia already have their policy manuals online, so they will be incorporated into eBoard. The online legal guide will be extremely useful to board members, Willis says, because it is searchable, easy to understand, and regularly updated. Boards won't have to buy print copies every time the law changes.

The superintendent can use eBoard to collect and post material on board meetings, financial reports, and other documents. Board members can easily access this material online without having to search through file cabinets; view the board agenda online; and for each action item, include a recommendation, rationale, description of how it's tied to the board's goals, financial impact, and alternatives. They will be able to post questions and comments to the superintendent. A "sticky notes" feature will allow board members to include their own personal notes that no one else will see.

- **School Issues Newsletter**

After joining the Montgomery County (Va.) school board in 1996, James Klagge created a newsletter, *School Issues Newsletter*, which he e-mailed to community residents in Blacksburg. Between 1996 and November 2001, 70 issues were published, reaching more than 10 percent of Klagge's constituents (over 500 individuals). Back issues are archived at http://members.aol.com/gisone/schools.htm).

Klagge makes it clear to subscribers that his newsletters are not official board reports; they express his personal views. The newsletter is an effort to engage the public, in an ongoing fashion, in the board's work and school-related issues, in general. "In this digital communication, I try to let people know what important issues the school board is considering; let people know what I think about those issues, giving the rationale for how I voted or anticipate voting on particular matters; solicit input about difficult or controversial issues; urge people to contact their representatives in local, state, and national government about taxes and other issues that affect education or community well-being."

"One controversial issue the board faced was what to do about a crowded old middle school: Should we expand and renovate it? Tear it down and build a new one on the same property? Or build a new school elsewhere? There were strong feelings about each of the options. After soliciting input—and getting more than 100 responses—I picked responses from the most articulate defenders of each option and circulated them to the list so that people could learn what others thought. I believe that helped defuse some of the controversy. When I voted on this issue, I circulated a detailed rationale and received a lot of positive feedback, even from those who would have voted differently" (Klagge, 1999).

> ***"True community engagement enables board members to listen to what community residents have to say about public education—about their hopes and dreams for their schools."***
>
> Anne L. Bryant
> NSBA

Researchers from the Blacksburg Electronic Village studied the impact of Klagge's e-newsletter over a three-year period. Their findings suggest that it had a significant impact on local parent and community participation in district business. (See Chapter 3 sidebar, "School Board Member's E-Mail List Boosts Parents' Engagement in School Issues.")

Web sites that work

The major contributions that technology-based tools make to family and community engagement—information, coaching and instruction, feedback—may come together effectively in a well-designed school or district Web site.

Nora Carr, assistant superintendent for public information for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (N.C.), says, "Harnessing the power of the Web to market your schools is a strategic—if somewhat neglected—management function" (Carr, 2001).

Carr's basic principles for school Web site construction include:

- Make sure the site is easy to navigate, emphasizes useful information, and features clean graphics and crisp copy.
- Avoid time-consuming downloads, stale information, and "under construction signs."
- Target the Web site; construct it from the end-user's perspective. For example, if a goal is to reach parents, put the information that parents care about on the home page. If a goal is to attract community participation in online forums, make sure forum topics and sign-up instructions are prominent.
- Take advantage of the Web's strengths. For example late-breaking news and information can be quickly and inexpensively disseminated via the Web.
- Use the Web site to bring to life teaching and learning in the school.
- Incorporate feedback mechanisms that enable two-way communication, such as e-mail, online opinion polls, and pop-up surveys.

See Appendix 2 for an overview of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Web development process.

Carr and others point out that the 24-hour accessibility and feedback opportunities that Web-based tools give have a down side too. Users expect speedy replies to their individual queries, and many people expect "something" to happen when they give their opinions. Another potential problem is the user who abuses the system by sending an excessive number of messages on trivial matters or those who send offensive messages. (See Appendix 3 for examples of policies and procedures to forestall legal problems associated with interactive Web sites.)

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) suggests that school staff, parents, and other appropriate individuals and organizations work together to craft guidelines on message responsiveness, frequency, and content. NSPRA suggests the following sample guidelines for both e-mail and voice mail communications (NSPRA, n. d.):

- All parent electronic inquiries will be answered within two working days. If responses are not received by then, contact the principal's office.
- Parents who abuse the system by sending an inordinate amount of messages per day on the same topic, or begin peppering the e-mail system with personal attacks on a staff member, will be informed that their mail will no longer be answered because they are abusing the system.

"The use of technology has been invaluable in making strides in community involvement and student instruction, and superintendents who let the cyber revolution pass them by are doing a disservice to their community and their students.

The Internet placed us in the consciousness of the community and parents as no number of town hall meetings could. The number of visitors to our Web site has increased from 2,000 to 5,000 a month. Our Web pages aim to give parents and others all the facts and figures they need to make informed decisions about Plainfield schools, from a school calendar to statistics on student population and educational attainment of teachers, to information about after-school programs and promoting literacy. The interactive nature of the system gives community members a voice and allows teachers to communicate through e-mail."

Larry Leverett
Superintendent of Schools
Plainfield, NJ
http://glef.org/EdutopiaPDF/Fall00.pdf

Interactive features

Many district Web sites offer users options for interacting with individual staff members, from teachers to superintendents, and with board members, other students, parents, or community members.

For example, Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), a Technology Leadership Network member district in Raleigh, North Carolina, has a Feedback Center on its Web site (http://www.wcpss.net/feedback/index.html). A recent visit to the Feedback Center turned up links to four online forums—bulletin boards or online discussion groups—on topics such as extending the school day, district policies on make-up days and school closing days, and the district's comprehensive building plan. WCPSS has an e-mail notification service, also accessible from the Feedback Center, which sends out timely e-mail messages about urgent district news and important events, such as delayed openings, school closings, early dismissals, public hearings, and new online forums.

To get the most out of online forums, qualified moderators should be assigned and participation guidelines developed (see sidebar, "Golden Rules of Online Communication"). Chapter 2, "Electronic Tools to Help School Boards Reach Out to Parents and Communities," includes a discussion of the management issues surrounding online forums and a sample online forum user agreement developed by Blue Valley Unified School District 229, a Technology Leadership Network district.

Golden Rules of Online Communication

- Communicate electronically with others as you would have them communicate with you.
- Discover and respect diverse online communications and learning styles. Ask others how they prefer to receive information and communications. For example, some people prefer lots of interaction and short pieces of information, while others like lots of details and getting everything at once and then they take longer to digest and reflect. Some want to be involved in many things online and others want to focus on just a few.
- Be a full participant—send as well as receive. It's always easier to be a spectator than a player.
- Acknowledge explicitly what you want to encourage. For example, if you ask for ideas, suggestions, or critical feedback and get responses from others, acknowledge their contributions explicitly, preferably by name, even if you disagree. If you want to increase responsiveness, acknowledge and praise those who are.
- If you have a strong reaction to something (either positive or negative), take time before responding. Your words will live on much longer than your initial reaction.

Reprinted with permission from: *Humanizing distributed electronic meetings.* Peter Johnson-Lenz and Trudy Johnson-Lenz. 1995. Lake Oswego, OR: Awakening Technology. http://www.awakentech.com/at/Awaken.nsf?OpenDatabase

Community connections

Schools can connect to local communities in a number of meaningful ways. These connections have a better chance of being lasting and productive when both sides in the interchange benefit. Projects managed by two Technology Leadership Network districts illustrate different approaches to using technology to forge stronger links with local communities.

- **Award-winning Career Planning Program Features Community Connections**

Hillsboro School District's curriculum and staff development coordinator, Vicki Lindberg, credits collaboration for the district's successful K-12 career planning program. "The most dynamic aspect of the Hillsboro School District career planning model is the collaboration that takes place between teachers, counselors, school-to-work coordinators, administrators, school board members, parents, and the business community...The collaboration has been our greatest strength, as we can share information, receive feedback and continually access and adjust our program to meet the needs of our students (http://www.schoolcounselor.org)."

Collaboration with local businesses has created scores of career-related internships, learning opportunities, and resources, which teachers, counselors, students, and parents can learn about from Business Education Links (Links). Links is a user-friendly online information

system, accessible from the district's career information Web site, Career-Related Learning Standards: K-12 Comprehensive Counseling & Career Development (http://www.hsd.k12.or.us/CRLS).

The site's description of Links says, "Links is designed to make it easy for local businesses and schools to connect with one another. Businesses that offer multiple career learning opportunities to schools can use Links as a clearinghouse for this information. Links will also track these resources for the businesses as schools use them."

Located in Hillsboro, Oregon, Hillsboro School District has 18,000 students and has been a Technology Leadership Network member since 1995. From the time they enter kindergarten to the time they graduate, Hillsboro students can expect to be involved in a comprehensive career planning process. Students must complete a written career plan, career-related learning experiences (CRLEs), and a career portfolio, as well as participate in a career-related standards-based curriculum, in order to graduate.

Program coordinator Ted Jansen sees the links to local businesses as important sources of the CRLEs, such as internships and job shadowing, that students must have to graduate. Technology has contributed to the program's success, says Jansen. "Technology has been a great communicator, both within our district and with the rest of Oregon. Technology has helped us organize our work."

Hillsboro was a 2000-2001 winner in the Planning for Life annual awards program, a competition that recognizes exemplary career planning programs. Planning for Life is sponsored by the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (http://www.goarmy.com) and administered by the American School Counselor Association (http://www.schoolcounselor.org).

- **Senior Citizens Computer Lab**

Students at Hunterdon Central Regional High School (HCRHS) in Flemington, New Jersey (http://www.hcrhs.hunterdon.k12.nj.us/), plan the curriculum and staff the Senior Citizens Computer Lab, which offers free workshops and practice sessions to local senior citizens. Hunterdon is a member of the Technology Leadership Network, with an enrollment of 2,200 students.

Workshops and labs are taught by members of the HCRHS chapter of the American Technology Honor Society, an outgrowth of the National Honor Society. A requirement of membership in the society is mentorship, which service in the senior citizens lab fulfills.

Weekly workshops and "open lab" practice sessions have a maximum enrollment of 24 senior citizens and last about 75 minutes. They take place at Hunterdon after school. The 2001-2002 course schedule included: "Introduction to the Internet," "Internet Page Creation," and "Tracking Your Stocks Using the Internet and MS Excel."

The project is cooperatively operated by the Hunterdon Central School Foundation, an independent nonprofit organization that supports the program financially, and the Hunterdon County Office on Aging. Started in 1994, it "continues to thrive and will be in place next year,' says Dr. Judy Gray (jgray@hcrhs.k12.nj.us), HCRHS assistant superintendent and program administrator.

As schools and districts confront shrinking budgets and a sometimes bewildering array of computer- and Internet-based products and services, educators have become increasingly attracted to applications and systems that can seamlessly perform multiple tasks. Make sure your checklist includes mechanisms to help advance your school or district family and community outreach program.

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Chapter 2

Electronic Tools to Help School Boards Reach Out to Parents and Communities

Kathy McGuigan
National School Boards Foundation

Introduction

In 2000, The National School Boards Foundation (NSBF)[1] received a $400,000, two-year grant from the AOL Time Warner Foundation to pilot Xchange: Strengthening Schools through Board Discussions. Xchange is guided by the belief that reducing the traditional barriers to public discourse around issues that are key to school success may facilitate parent and community involvement in children's education.

Major program goals

- to demonstrate, through pilot sites, how electronic dialogue and electronic networks can be effective in encouraging parental participation in school governance and public engagement
- to evaluate and disseminate to school boards nationwide blueprints of the public engagement models developed by the pilot sites
- to build and pilot a Web site template that will assist school boards in communicating with their constituents using online technologies

The Xchange design called for creating a prototype Web site template dedicated to providing and gathering school board information—a well-designed site that includes menus, message boards, and online polls that are equipped with both information retrieval and exchange features. Through December 2001, Learning Network, formerly Family Education Network (an online community for parents) served as the technical partner in building the Xchange tools. Palm, Inc. (http://www.palm.com) donated refurbished Palm III's to assist the pilot participants—board members, superintendents, PR directors, technology directors, etc.—with organizing and tracking the electronic communications in Xchange.

This chapter describes the pilot project, Xchange: Strengthening Schools through Board Discussions, and considers how lessons learned from the project can help school boards and districts improve student achievement by improving communication between communities and boards. The chapter also outlines steps school boards can take to implement the Xchange model in their districts and provides sample tools developed by the project.

School district pilot sites

Five school districts were selected as pilot test sites for the Xchange Web site template, with community interest and use evaluated over the course of the project. In selecting school districts to participate in the pilot, NSBF employed common recruitment strategies: identifying likely contenders from the National School Boards Association (NSBA) National Affiliate program, examining district Web sites to check out existing Internet-based outreach efforts, and soliciting recommendations from various educational associations. NSBF sought a representative mix of urban, suburban, and rural districts.

In the fall of 2000, the five districts selected as pilot sites were announced:

- Blue Valley Unified School District (Overland Park, Kansas)
- Calcasieu Parish School District (Lake Charles, Louisiana)
- Greendale School District (Greendale, Wisconsin)
- Pittsburgh Public Schools (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
- Solon Community Schools (Solon, Iowa)

Solon Community Schools eventually withdrew from the project, citing insufficient staff to fully implement the pilot test. Early in 2002, three of the four remaining pilot sites launched the local Web sites they developed using the Xchange Web site template (see sidebar for URLs). During the remaining months of the project, NSBF will monitor online dialogue, identify best practices, and study and disseminate results.

Updates on the program, as well as outcomes and resources, are available on the NSBF Web site (http://www.xchangecentral.org).

A Tool to Inform and Engage

Xchange was created as an experiment to examine the application of new technology—the Internet—to a ubiquitous and enduring school board goal: improved communication with the communities they serve. Would school board members, searching for signs of public interest but sensitive to intense scrutiny, open up the lines of communication beyond the telephone, the newsletter, and cable coverage? Would people who were using the Internet to send greeting cards and get directions to their next meeting also use it to research school board policies on dress codes? Would they relay their opinions via a message board as easily as they e-mail their friends?

> *"You think you know what the issues are. This way, we'll really find out what the issues are. The more information you can get to people, the better decisions they can make. The ability for community members to ask questions and have input, I think, will change the way we govern."*
>
> Jude Theriot, Superintendent
> Calcasieu Parish (La.)

Each district brought its own set of expectations to the project. Common to all was a commitment to increase interaction between the board and community by adding another tool for communication. "We think there may be another segment of our community that

Xchange School District Pilot Sites

■ Blue Valley USD 229

location: Overland Park, Kansas—a suburban Kansas City district

enrollment: 15,000 students; 26 schools

district URL: http://www.bluevalleyk12.org

Xchange URL: http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/xchange/default.htm

■ Calcasieu Parish School System

location: Lake Charles, Louisiana—a large district which encompasses over 1,000 square miles

enrollment: 35,000 students; 61 schools

district URL: www.cpsb.org

Xchange URL: http://www.cpsb.org/system/board

■ Greendale School District

location: Greendale, Wisconsin— suburban Milwaukee

enrollment: 2,200 students; 5 schools

District URL: http://www.greendale.k12.wi.us

Xchange URL: http://www.greendale.k12.wi.us/SchoolBoard/index.html

■ Pittsburgh Public Schools

location: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—a large urban district

enrollment: 47,000 students; 97 schools

District URL: http://www.pps.pgh.pa.us

■ Solon Community Schools

location: Solon, Iowa—rural

enrollment: 1,000 students; 3 schools

District URL: http://www.solon.k12.ia.us

will really welcome an online opportunity to communicate," said Bob Moore, Blue Valley's director of information.

"This is a virtual coffee shop where people can gather and communicate about school issues," said William Hughes, Greendale superintendent. Solon's Web site moderator, University of Iowa professor Bob Upmeyer, anticipated that the Web site would not replace face-to-face meetings but would provide another option for communicating in a community where "even the family farmers have satellites and global positioning."

In both the Pittsburgh and Calcasieu Parish school districts, Xchange was viewed as a way to surface issues and gaps in knowledge in the community. "You think you know what the

issues are," said Calcasieu Parish superintendent Jude Theriot. "This way, we'll really find out what the issues are. The more information you can get to people, the better decisions they can make. The ability for community members to ask questions and have input, I think, will change the way we govern."

"From a research standpoint," said Pittsburgh public relations director Pat Crawford, "we will know where the gaps are in terms of community understanding of important issues. We'll be able to fill the gaps on the Xchange Web site and with other communications vehicles."

Citizens echoed district expectations for the role Xchange might play. Parents, as well as community residents who had no children in local schools, were recruited to explore a trial version of the site and to discuss, in focus groups, the potential of online communication. From Pittsburgh to Solon, from Greendale to Calcasieu Parish, focus group participants strongly supported the concept of Xchange. One participant commented, "I think we're in about the first inning of a nine-inning revolution. The Internet is just going to become more and more prevalent...if anything, the leadership of the schools needs to be on the progressive end of that curve."

In each participating district, community residents viewed their school board's use of the Web as a commitment to improved communication and a willingness to capitalize on a still-emerging technology. They concluded that the ultimate benefit of Xchange could be increased citizen involvement in the work of the school board and school district. Greater involvement, they said, could translate into better decision making on the part of the board.

Implementing Xchange in Local Communities

The guidelines and tools in this section are designed to help school leaders set up an Xchange section on their districts' Web sites. Covered issues include how to get buy-in for the concept and how to define responsibilities for the board and district personnel who will make Xchange work.

Who will use Xchange?

Parents may land in the Xchange section when they visit the district's Web site searching for information about the school year calendar. Senior citizens may arrive there when they learn there's a chance for them to express an opinion about remodeling the high school they attended. Those who use computers on a regular basis are more likely to explore the site; however, districts can expect traffic from families who do not have a computer at home but log on at a local library. The site will be visited by those who find it easier to get information online than from a telephone directory. And if online polling and a message board are offered, site owners are likely to hear from residents who can't—or won't—make time to come to a board meeting, but who will be pleased to find another way to register their thoughts.

Getting agreement to Xchange information and ideas

The success of Xchange will depend on a commitment from board members and the superintendent to add a new tool to the existing toolbox of communications strategies. Devote time to discussing the potential of this tool and the impact it could have on the board's communication efforts and decision-making processes. Two instruments developed

by the Xchange project—the Readiness Assessment and the Computer Assessment—can help launch this discussion (both tools can be found at the end of this chapter).

The Readiness Assessment should be completed and discussed during a single meeting attended by board members, the public relations director, the superintendent, and the technology director. Plan to spend some time discussing the results, which will give a snapshot of current communications strategies and help identify areas that call for setting new goals.

Board members and the superintendent should also complete the Computer Assessment form. The Computer Assessment and the Readiness Assessment should be completed at the same meeting, but the Computer Assessment is not discussed. It's simply passed on to the technology director who uses the completed forms to identify the individuals who will need computer training in order to participate in an Xchange communications format.

Xchange Components

Discuss and decide on the Xchange components to be used. The Xchange design offers a Web site with three kinds of information:

- static information that does not change often, such as board policies and committee makeup;
- dynamic information that changes more frequently, such as board minutes; and
- transactional information that requires users to interact with the site, such as giving feedback through online polling mechanisms or posting messages on discussion boards.

Boards launching Xchange may decide to begin their communication effort with just static and dynamic information, then add interactive tools later.

There is a cost attached to most new programs. It may be relatively easy to upload information to a site, but it requires time from someone who possesses the relevant knowledge. Making it easier for people to contact board members or district personnel means more mail to answer. While deliberating about whether to invest in a new or enhanced Web site, heed the caution from those citizens who previewed Xchange: "If you do this, don't start it and then drop it."

Roles and responsibilities

A number of people will play a role in making the Web site a success—school board members, the moderator/online host, the superintendent, the public relations director, the board secretary, and the technology director. Once there is agreement on increasing board connections with the community, each board member and district official needs to commit to being an active user, listener, and champion of Xchange.

- **School board members**

School board members must be capable and responsive users of Xchange. Before the Web site is launched, they should participate in training to learn what is available on the site and how to use the interactive tools. Each member is responsible for conferring with the other

board members and the superintendent at school board meetings to decide what issues should be posted to the interactive area. School board members also will be responsible for checking and responding, when necessary, to online commentary and feedback on a daily or weekly basis, depending on the volume of online traffic. They should be aware of the issues under discussion and come to board meetings prepared to discuss the online interactions.

- **Moderator/online host**

The moderator is the online guide for the Xchange virtual community. This person will welcome visitors, check the site daily, have access to the technical controls for the site, and encourage substantial participation on school board issues. The moderator should have extensive knowledge of the school district and a balanced perspective on the issues. The online host also will need to be creative in organizing and presenting information and topics for discussion. The moderator must be willing to listen to the participants and ensure that all views receive a fair hearing. The moderator will post the school board newsletter to the e-mail newsletter service, update issues, read discussion boards daily, route questions to appropriate district staff, and monitor postings to eliminate inappropriate language or libelous messages. Some of the funding for the NSBF pilot project at each site

Sample User Agreement
Blue Valley Unified School District 229
Overland Park, Kansas

Guidelines for use

The Virtual Village (a.k.a. Xchange) guidelines are offered to aid in the communication and for the benefit of all users of this message board. The goal of the Virtual Village is to provide a community forum for the purpose of discussing relevant topics and issues. It will serve as yet another communication tool for the board of education (BoE) in guiding the future direction of the Blue Valley School District.

The topics are chosen by the board to address current or important issues, which may also be discussed at BoE meetings in the future. The Virtual Village message board is moderated. We would like to ask all users' cooperation with the following guidelines.

Please ensure that your post is relevant to the current topic/thread. The moderator will exercise discretion in judging if a post is related or not. If it is not, he/she may forward your question/comment to the administrator/ department that may be better equipped to answer or address it. Messages that are not useful or lack genuine feedback/content may be removed by the moderator.

Please refrain from making any libelous statements on the discussion board. While all participants are welcome, any libelous or derogatory statements made about or toward another will be removed from the message board.

In the interest of all participants involved, please refrain from posting links to commercial or nonprofit (i.e., .com or .org sites) that may not adhere to the Blue Valley core values or may be biased in their content. Those postings may be removed.

Profanity or vulgar language in posts is not allowed. The moderator will remove the post and may contact the user. If profane or vulgar postings continue, the user may lose his or her posting privileges.

was used to recruit, train, and provide a modest stipend to a moderator. Moderators received free AOL subscriptions and leased laptop computers from NSBF. Project coordinators learned from the pilot sites the value of choosing a moderator who is familiar to the local community—for example, a retired administrator, teacher, or board member—and who knows how to converse in "ed-speak."

- **Superintendent**

Not only will the superintendent lead the board in deciding the issues that should be open to discussion, the superintendent also will support board member participation, promote Xchange whenever possible, participate when appropriate, and discuss the online interactions at board meetings.

- **Public relations director**

The public relations director should create a marketing plan for the Web site to develop awareness and monitor the level of interest and use (see sample Marketing Plan at the end of this chapter). The public relations office also may produce the school board newsletter that the moderator will post to the e-mail newsletter service, assist the board secretary in reporting minutes of school board meeting minutes, and promote the Xchange URL in print materials (e.g., newsletters, brochures) published by the district.

- **Board secretary**

The board secretary will be responsible for the dynamic information that changes frequently, such as the board calendar and minutes. The board secretary also will serve as the point person for all questions relating to board business.

- **Technology director**

The technology director will be responsible for training all school board members in basic e-mail functions, Web navigation, and word processing. The technology director also will serve as the liaison for all questions and concerns related to the interrelationship between the district's technology infrastructure and policies and the Xchange Web site.

Organizing Information

If the results of the Readiness Assessment, Computer Assessment, and board discussion produce a decision to proceed with implementing Xchange, the next move will be organizing the content. Xchange is dedicated to school board communications—both "to" and "with" the community. The content on the school board portion of your district Web site is likely to fall into one of three categories outlined earlier—static, dynamic, or transactional.

Static and dynamic information: Make it comprehensive

Gathering the necessary information for solid school board communications via the Web will be a collaborative effort. Each school district is unique in how such information is gathered and disseminated; however, the goal is to assign each of the following sections to a particular point person. The point person will be responsible for gathering and editing the content and conferring with the Webmaster to ensure that the content is posted to the school board section of the district Web site.

- Meet the board—Who are the board members? What are their terms of office? How long have they served? Create a standard format and length for board member biographies.
- Communicating with the board —How can visitors to the site relay messages to the board? Is there an e-mail address for each board member? Or will one message go to all board members? Are phone numbers included for those who want to have a real-time conversation? Individual pictures are a welcome addition.
- Board committees—How is the board organized to accomplish its work? What committees exist, and who serves on them? When do they meet? How is the committee contacted?
- Board policies—What governance policies and procedures does the board use? The board handbook containing policies and procedures may be posted in Portable Document Format (PDF) or some other convenient electronic format.
- Board calendar—Is there a calendar showing date, time, and location of the year's meetings? You also can post committee meetings and all school board activities to this area. Customizable calendar software is available at very modest prices.
- Board agendas—What will the board be discussing at its next meeting? Is the agenda free of jargon so that readers can know what happens during each item on the agenda? One person (board assistant/secretary) will need to be responsible for posting the agenda to the Web site in a timely and useful manner.
- Board minutes—What happened at the board meeting(s) last month? Do the minutes offer sufficient explanation for readers to understand the issues and the reasons for board decisions? If possible, provide minutes for the current year in a searchable format. Use PDF files for previous years. Once approved by the board, one person (board assistant/secretary) will need to be responsible for posting the minutes to the Web site in a timely and useful manner.
- Accomplishments/awards—Is there good news to share?

Xchange Web Site Content: Types of Information

Examples of Static Information

- Meet the board: board identification
- Communicating with the board
- Board committees
- Board policies

Examples of Dynamic Information

- Board calendar
- Board agendas
- Board minutes
- Accomplishments/awards

Examples of Transactional Information and Tools

- Polls
- Message boards
- Feedback form
- Mailing list

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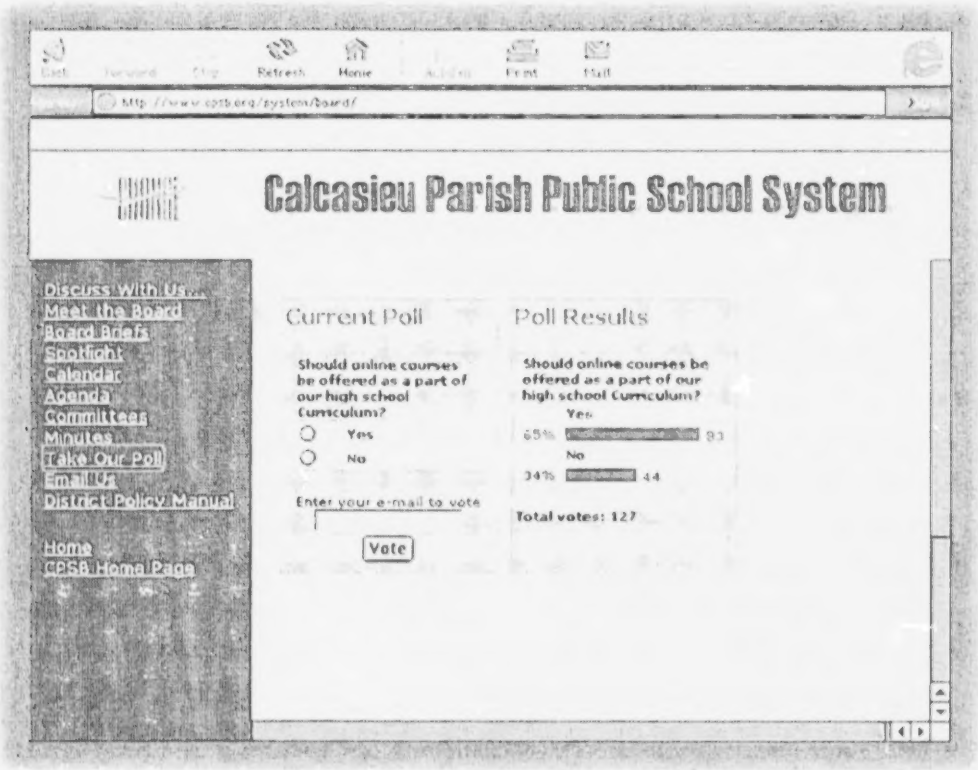

Transactional Information—Making Xchange a reality

What makes Xchange truly an exchange of information is a set of communication tools that can connect school board members and the community. NSBF and Learning Network collaborated to identify and design the best tools to help school boards solicit feedback from their constituents. A major goal of the project is to determine the effectiveness of the tools in actual practice.

Based on the feedback from the five pilot districts, NSBF launched the first version of the Xchange tools in spring 2001, with the following components:

- Polls—Polls give school board members and district administrators a chance to learn what parents and community members think about the topics the school board will be discussing. This tool lets site administrators create, edit, activate, and delete polls.
- Message boards—Initially, the Xchange Web site prototype included a traditional message board, but participants in a focus group convened by the project could not navigate the message board easily. Constituents wanted a simple way to comment on the issue at hand. In version two of the Xchange tools to be released, the message board and the polling mechanism will be combined in one package.
- Feedback form—This tool allows site administrators to modify the routing of the feedback forms completed on the Xchange Web site. Each school district can decide who will receive the completed feedback form. For the Xchange pilot, it was recommended that the moderator and public relations director receive the e-mail.

- Mailing list—The mailing list will enable boards to distribute school board briefs (updates from the board meetings) on a regular basis. With this tool, changes to the distribution list can be made easily.

Xchange administrative tools

An administrative package is included in the Xchange toolkit. The administrative tools will allow any school district to implement any or all of the transactional tools. Currently, access to the administrative package is limited to the pilot participants of the Xchange project. NSBF is currently looking into a system to deliver the Xchange tools to school districts nationwide by fall 2002.

Conclusion

The original intent of the Xchange project was to provide an online publishing template that would allow school districts to easily upload all three categories of school board content—static, dynamic, and transactional. Based on the prototype that was unveiled to end-users through focus groups, the Xchange project shifted its focus to build only the transactional sections. There are two key reasons for this—the Learning Network Web publishing tool used for the static and dynamic sections was rudimentary, and each pilot school district already had a Web presence via their own district Web site. Creating an entirely new and unfamiliar Web presence using the Learning Network product confused the end-users.

Based on focus group results, each district became responsible for uploading and maintaining the static and dynamic sections to their school board section of the district Web site. Xchange became responsible for providing and maintaining the tools for the transactional sections of the Xchange Web sites. Thus, for end-users, there is now no inconsistency in the look and feel of content when they move from static to dynamic to transactional portions of the Web site.

The future of Xchange

Through the work accomplished to date, it is clear that a more comprehensive study needs to be conducted to gauge how Xchange is changing the ways school board members are making decisions, as well as how Xchange is changing the dynamics of community engagement in local school governance. NSBF seeks to sustain the project past the initial two-year trial period by continuing to evaluate the pilot school districts over several years while building the capacity of the tools to allow more school districts to implement Xchange. For more information on how your district can be involved in the next steps of Xchange, please contact the National School Boards Foundation at 703-535-1604 or email nsbf@nsbf.org. For updates on the Xchange project, visit http://www.xchangecentral.org.

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Endnotes

1 The National School Boards Foundation (http://www.nsbf.org) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization affiliated with the National School Boards Association and dedicated to preparing school board members to be catalysts for systemic reform in the public schools.

Readiness Assessment

Commitment from several parties is key to making Xchange a viable option for your school district. If there is interest in using Xchange in your district, we encourage you to provide this informal readiness assessment to the superintendent, board members, public relations director, and technology director.

This is not a checklist, but rather a tool to be used for discussion about your current school board communications strategies and how technology may improve your community outreach. Make copies and distribute it. Each person will circle the appropriate response and submit to a point person to review and discuss the results. If there is general harmony in the responses, Xchange may be suitable for your school district.

Orientation to Improvement

1. The school board/school district seeks to improve communication with its constituents.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. The school board/school district seeks input from a larger group of community members than from those who attend board meetings.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. The board has a desire to increase its use of technology.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. As a superintendent, board member, public relations director, or technology director, I have access to technology at home or at the office.
   Yes No

5. As a superintendent, board member, public relations director or technology director, I am committed to providing the information necessary to make Xchange another avenue of community relations for our school district.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. As a superintendent, board member, public relations director, or technology director, I am prepared to meet regularly on the Xchange content and discuss the feedback we receive from our constituents.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Current communication

7. The board members communicate well with one another.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The board communicates well with the superintendent.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. The board communicates well with the administration and staff.
   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. The board publicizes its calendar of events.
    Yes No

11. The board posts meeting agendas to the district Web site.
    Yes No

12. The board meeting notes currently are posted to the district Web site.
    Yes No

13. The district airs the board meetings on a community access cable channel.
    Yes No

14. Details of the board's decisions are explained to the community.
    Always Frequently Rarely Never

15. The board seeks input from groups who likely will disagree with its decision.
    Always Frequently Rarely Never

16. The board has ad hoc committees that include staff and community representatives.
    Yes No

17. The board obtains information on the perspectives of staff and community members (e.g., focus groups, surveys).
    Regularly Rarely Never

Technology Preparation

18. The board uses technology (e.g., e-mail) to conduct its business.
    Yes No

19. Our community's public library system has public access to technology (e.g., the Internet).
    Yes No

20. Our school system supports community members accessing technology through local schools.
    Yes No

21. Each board member has an e-mail account.
    Yes No

22. The board members are given school district e-mail accounts.
    Yes No

23. The board/school district currently sends a newsletter to the community.
    Yes No

24. The local newspaper reports on board business regularly.
    Yes No

25. The school district can designate someone (staff person or volunteer) to be the moderator to monitor the Xchange area.
    Yes No

Computer Assessment

What are you currently using for HOME computer access? Please circle your choice below. If you are using something other than what is listed, please fill in the blank.

Hardware

386 486 Pentium Power Mac iMac other _____

Modem

14.4K 28.8K 56K Cable Access DSL T1 other _____

Operating System

Mac OS 7.X Windows 3.1 Win 95 Win 98 Windows NT other _____

E-mail Software

AOL Netscape MS Outlook Eudora Groupwise other _____

This simple diagnostic tool will help to assess if any training is necessary for your participation in the online school boards communications project. Please answer the following questions by selecting the "yes" or "no" box. If you wish to expound upon any of the questions, please do so on the right side of the page. Your honest assessment will guide us in our training preparation.

E-Mail Assessment

Can you...

****** Level 1 ******	Yes	No
Create a new message?		
Send a message?		
Save a draft message?		
Reply to sender of the message?		
Reply to all recipients of the message?		
Forward a message?		
Create mailboxes?		
Transfer messages to mailboxes?		
Retrieve messages from various mailboxes?		
Find someone's email address?		
****** Level 2 ******	*******	*******
Edit and organize mailboxes?		
Create a signature?		
Re-send a previously sent message?		
Receive attachments?		
Send attachments?		
Sort mailbox by sender?		
Sort mailbox by date?		
Leave mail on the server ?		
****** Level 3 ******	*******	*******
Create filters?		
Queue a message for future sending?		

Web Assessment

Can you...

****** Level 1 ******	Yes	No
Click on a link to view another page?		
Add a bookmark?		
Go to a bookmarked page?		
Enter a URL in the location box?		
Use the home, back, forward buttons?		
Cut/copy and paste a URL to another application?		
Find information using a search engine (for example, "Yahoo")?		
****** Level 2 ******	*******	*******
Edit and organize your bookmarks ?		
Increase the font size in your browser?		
Remove the button tool bar?		
Turn off Java?		
Clear local cache?		
****** Level 3 ******	*******	*******
Save a web page graphic to a local drive?		
Open a web page on your local drive?		
Create a web page by entering the html source code?		
Create a web page by using a web editor?		
Publish a created document for browsing on the web?		
View document source?		

Word Processing Assessment

Can you...

****** Level 1 ******	Yes	No
Create a new document?		
Open an existing document?		
Save a document?		
Save a document under another name?		
Print a document?		
Select a section of the document?		
Copy a section of the document?		
Paste a section of the document?		
Cut a section of the document?		
Change the font?		
Change the style (bold, italic, underline)?		
Change the size of the font?		
Change the color of a font?		
Check spelling?		
****** Level 2 ******	*******	*******
Change the tab stops?		
Adjust the margins?		
Replace all occurrences of a particular word with a different word?		
Create a numbered list?		
Create a bulleted list?		
Change line spacing (single or double)?		
Change justification (left, right, center, full)?		

(continued)

(Word Processing Assesment continued)

Show or hide the paragraph marker and spacing codes?		
Insert page numbers?		
Print preview?		
Change page views?		
Use the "undo" button?		
****** Level 3 ******	*******	*******
Insert a new table?		
Delete a table?		
Change text into a table?		
Change a table into text?		
Widen a column in a table?		
Insert a new column in a table?		
Insert a new row in a table?		
Delete a column in a table?		
Delete a row in a table?		
Create mailing labels?		
Create mail merge letters?		
Change the default folder in which your documents are automatically saved?		
Use templates?		
Use styles?		

Please place any additional comments/questions here.

School District Marketing Plan

A marketing plan will help you identify what you want to communicate about the Web site and how you will get your message across to different audiences.

Audience

Community members who live and work within the district boundary include:

- Parents of students enrolled in school
- District employees
- Students
- Civic activists
- Business owners and employees
- Taxpayers without children in school

Core marketing messages

- Increasing community involvement in the educational process can improve decision making and increase student achievement.
- Xchange is a time-saver; it offers the option to communicate opinions on school governance issues quickly and conveniently.
- The school board is an elected body that represents the values, standards, and principles of the community. The more the board understands the views held by its constituents, the better the board can represent its community.

Why is Xchange important?

- Community residents are all stakeholders in the school district and want to be able to give and get information. They have a right to make their voices heard.
- Xchange builds support for the board and for schools by demonstrating commitment to informing the public and obtaining feedback.

What are the barriers to communicating about Xchange?

- Lack of time—With busy lives, residents have limited time to learn about new options for communicating and to use these new tools.
- Lack of information—Community members may not understand the process by which they can get involved or know how to use the Internet to obtain information.
- Lack of interest—It is hard to reach citizens who lack interest in the issues affecting schools. Residents without children in school may feel disconnected from the district.

What information can Xchange provide?

- Xchange will provide information on board activities and actions and will inform readers on how to get involved.
- Xchange will make it easy to become involved because everything will be in one place online.

What media vehicles will be used to communicate about Xchange, and what kind of media exposure can be donated to the school district?

- Press releases
- Articles in local papers
- Articles and ads in school district newsletters
- Articles and ads in Parent-Teacher Association newsletters
- Flyers posted at all points of public access to technology
- Regional radio ads or public service announcements
- Regional print ads
- Banner ads on the district Web site
- Banner ads on local interest Web sites (e.g., newspapers, libraries, chamber of commerce)
- Spokesperson development and training to give presentations

For a full listing of media outlets in your area, visit

http://capwiz.com/nsba/dbq/media/

You may want to conduct focus groups in your community to learn the answers to these questions:

- Who will be most interested in Xchange and how will they learn about it?
- What information do our various audiences want to obtain?
- What issues are of greatest importance to our community?
- What is the best way to reach our audiences?

Chapter 2

Electronic Communities: Supporting Public Engagement

Carol M. Hotz and Gerald D. Bailey
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Why should schools form closer links with the families and communities from which their students come? The most immediate and imperative reason is the expectation that closer connections will help to improve student outcomes. Stronger connections also help schools transform themselves into broad-based learning organizations that include—and benefit—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

Developing Learning Organizations

How do learning organizations differ from more traditionally managed organizations, and why are the differences important? "A learning organization is not so much characterized by its altered structure (flatter and less hierarchical) and redesign of work (emphasis on teams), but by the transformation of the relationship of the organization to the individual and increased capacity for adaptation and change" (Chase, n. d.). The ability of organizations, including schools, to adapt to evolving social, economic, political, and technological realities will be more critical than ever in the 21st century, which promises to be an age of rapid and profound changes in the way people live, learn, and work. Leaders of learning organizations recognize that successful, ongoing adaptation to change requires continuous learning by those within the organization. Without learning, growth is retarded, and eventually the organization stagnates or withers.

Schools have traditionally functioned as top-down organizations, ruled by policies and decisions made by relatively few individuals who often have little interaction with the groups affected by the decisions and policies. In contrast,

> The school as learning organization would be a system, rather than the sum of separate parts. This is perhaps the most important difference, and must be understood by all the people involved. Administrators, teachers, students, support staff, parents, and community members all have a stake in how the school operates, and so to maximize the performance, they must all be a part of the decision making, the direction(s) in which the school will move. The system approach to running a school allows all access to the great amount of knowledge that is spread across the various groups. Administrators have knowledge of ideas, facts and patterns that teachers, students, parents, community, and support staff do not have. Teachers have knowledge that comes from their work in the organization, knowledge that is unique to their position. Each of the groups can see the school and its

> work in a different way from the others; each group has unique insight into the school, and thus something to contribute to the whole. (Chase, 2000).

Within schools that seek to become learning organizations, processes and structures are put into place to promote dialogue, information sharing, and widespread participation in decision making.

Systemwide thinking and planning are promoted so that sharing and learning occur throughout the entire district, as well as at various collective levels within schools. There is a recognition that information and communication, flowing from all segments of the system, fuel the learning processes that keep schools vibrant and responsive.

Leaders of learning organizations must be able to cultivate a collective image of desired outcomes, recognizing that the significant changes required to generate the outcomes cannot be enacted without the cooperation of the people who are expected to alter in the way they work. Sharing information, purposes, visions, and decision making at all levels is necessary in order to develop planning strategies that will benefit the entire organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1999; O'Neill, 1995). The challenge for school leaders is to develop a communication system that will encourage the exchange of information among the various groups and individuals within the school community (Snyder & Snyder, 1996).

Electronic Communities

Computer-mediated communications (CMC) technologies have produced a number of cost-effective tools that schools can use to facilitate more ongoing and productive interaction with families and community members. CMC includes e-mail, instant messaging, distance learning, Internet forums, newsgroups, e-mail lists, bulletin boards, online shopping, videoconferencing, and more. Using one or more of these tools, schools can sponsor or participate in electronic communities that facilitate school-community connections, a critical component in transforming schools into true learning organizations (Schuler, 1996a).

An electronic, or virtual, community consists of a group of people who share common interests that are mediated through a computer network. Virtual communities vary in organizational complexity and scope. Since the early 1980s, hundreds of interest groups have used e-mail distribution lists and online bulletin boards to form virtual communities. Today, there are thousands of bulletin boards (electronic message centers) that provide a variety of forums (online discussion groups) on a wide range of topics. These forums are sometimes called newsgroups.

P-12 educators have enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to share with their colleagues information and resources; get answers to questions or help with classroom questions; or exchange views on thorny education issues. For example, the Web portal Education World (http://www.educationworld.com/) sponsors more than 20 message boards geared to teachers, administrators, students, parents, home schoolers, counselors, teacher educators, and content specialists. Topics include science and technology, special education, early childhood education, administrative issues, and lesson planning.

Wake County Public Schools

Similar CMC tools are used by schools to connect and interact with local families and community members. For example, Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), a

member of NSBA's Technology Leadership Network, employs its Web site (http://www.wcpss.net/) as a gateway to several electronic mechanisms for sending and receiving information between the district and the public. WCPSS, which includes Raleigh, N.C., has an enrollment of more than 100,000 K-12 students.

Members of the public can sign up for an e-mail notification service, which delivers timely e-mail alerts concerning urgent WCPSS news and important events such as school closings, delays in opening, early dismissals, public hearings, and announcements about online forums. The district describes its Feedback Center as "a central hub for all of our listening efforts." From the center's Web page, visitors can send e-mail to the superintendent and the school board and participate in online forums by posting to bulletin boards their views on various topics, as well as reading the comments of their fellow citizens. Recent forum topics included the PLAN 2000 Online Forum, the district's three-year comprehensive building plan; Extending the School Day Forum; and Make-Up Days Forum. The School Connection is a biweekly e-newsletter focusing on events and news of interest to WCPSS students, parents, and "anyone interested in public education." The newsletter is posted on the district Web site and, upon request, can be e-mailed.

Public Online Forums

Public online forums are among the more interactive electronic tools for bringing community members together around a common purpose. But they can stagnate or generate conflict if not managed properly. The following guidelines for managing online forums are found in the 1997 article, "Seven Steps to Building Electronic Communities" by Phillipa Gamse and Terry Grunwald (http://www.totalnetval.com/7-steps.htm).

Tips for managing a forum

- Have a paid facilitator if at all possible. Facilitation needs tend to grow; not diminish.
- Consult with experienced newsgroup or mailing list moderators.
- Identify and post the kinds of information most important to your users.
- Make sure the information is relevant, timely, and posted at regular intervals.
- Encourage all users to post items, make it as easy as possible, applaud every contribution.
- Make the forum simple to access, navigate, and search. Remove outdated items. Keep the information fresh.
- Keep up to date with technological developments, e.g. multi-media applications.

Community networks

Schools also partner with other public and private groups and agencies to create broad-based, complex community networks. Traditionally, the principle guiding community networks has been a belief in the importance of providing "public spaces on the information highway." One of the oldest community networks is in Davis, Calif. The network's homepage offers the following description of the role and purpose of community networks.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> Community Networks (also Public, Public Access or Civic Networks) are generally directed at serving the common interests of geographically defined communities through electronic communication among citizens, government, private organizations and local business. As information providers, they must address the issues of content and access. Content varies from material of interest mainly to a geographically defined community or region to material of more general interest, relating perhaps to cultural affiliation or civic discourse, and it also includes, increasingly, interactive services. Access refers to the physical means by which users are connected to the network, and community networks must choose the degree to which they attempt to provide that access themselves and the degree to which they rely on (or have their users rely on) commercial means. Community networks seek to provide low-cost access to services of value to the public, and so usually operate as non-profit organizations supported by grants, private donations and/or subscriber fees. Public-private partnerships are often formed in order to acquire and integrate needed resources. (*Community Networks*, 2000)

Community networks can be cost-effective providers of Internet-related services for schools attempting to boost their community outreach efforts.

Started in the early 1990s, the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV; http://www.bev.net/) is a ground-breaking community network based at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), a public land-grant university in Blacksburg, Va. In 2000, according to BEV reports, Blacksburg had the "highest per capita use of the Internet in the world, with more than 87% of Blacksburg residents online and more than 50% of the community using broadband (typically 10 megabit Ethernet or better) services at home, at work, or both" (Blacksburg Electronic Village, 2000). In addition, Blacksburg was the "first county in the United States to have every school directly connected to the Internet. In Montgomery County today, every classroom, in every school has direct, high-speed Internet access." In Blacksburg, the low-cost Internet-based services BEV makes available not only facilitate the day-to-day work of schools, but the community network has also promoted increased interaction between parents and the local school board (see sidebar, "School Board Member's E-Mail List Boosts Community' Engagement in School Issues")

Tips for Planning and Implementing Electronic Communities

Electronic tools, such as e-mail lists or online forums, can offer to schools cost-effective mechanisms for keeping parents and community members informed and encouraging their participation in school programs. To get the most out of such tools, follow these guidelines.

- Create a casual, warm, welcoming, and supportive online atmosphere. An informal style of communication helps build a sense of community.
- Document and publicize successes. Sharing accomplishments helps to unite the schools and the community.
- Ask for feedback. Find out how participants feel about the content of electronic exchanges, as well as the logistical aspects.

School Board Member's E-Mail List Boosts Parents' Engagement in School Issues

In a paper that discusses the impact of the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) in Blacksburg (Va.), Andrew Cohill, BEV's director, shares findings from two surveys that investigated the effect of a school board member's electronic mailing list on parent participation in community issues.

"In Blacksburg, we recently conducted the second of two surveys we have done of a group of parents who subscribe to a mailing list run by one of our local school board supervisors. We have been trying to find out what happens when you diffuse technology widely in the community. This school board member sends out a thoughtful and lengthy note about schools issues every six weeks or so. The first time we did this survey, we found the results quite interesting, but were cautious about the findings because it was not a truly random survey. Parents were asked to fill out and return the survey, and those that do may tend to be more interested in technology or more interested in community issues.

But now that we have conducted the survey twice, we can look at the results between the two sets of data and have more confidence. What we found was that:

- In 1996, 79% of parents found the mailing list helpful in clarifying issues. In 1999, 88% found it helpful.
- In 1996, 82% felt more involved in school issues because of the list. In 1999 91% felt more involved.
- In 1996, about 13% were more likely to attend a public meeting because of the list. In 1999, almost 21% were more likely to get out of the house and attend public meetings on school issues.
- In 1996, 53% of parents were more likely to write to a school official because of this list. In 1999, all of the parents were still writing to school officials.
- In 1996, only about 4% of parents said they had spoken at a public meeting because of information received on this list, but in 1999, 27% had not only gone to a public meeting on school issues but had also spoken at the meeting.

In 1996, when we conducted the first survey, 369 parents were on the list. In 1999, 860 parents were on the list. A simple mailing list is getting nearly one thousand people involved in community affairs. I want to emphasize that this mailing list is twenty year old technology. Someone with an IBM XT could be participating in this forum. Anecdotally, in Blacksburg and in other communities with community networks, we keep hearing the same story over and over again: When community and civic groups go online, attendance at their meetings goes up."

Reprinted by permission. Networks and the Knowledge Democracy: Nine Challenges for Communities. Copyright 2001 by Andrew M. Cohill.
http://www.bev.net/project/digital_library/cn_kd.pdf

Note: Information on the survey referenced in this excerpt can be found at in BEV Research Studies, 1995-1998: Technical Report 1999-01.
http://www.bev.net/project/digital_library/BEVrsrch.pdf

- Encourage people to participate in feedback and exchange opportunities. Encouragement should be gentle, but consistent. It may be necessary to do a bit of handholding and cheerleading.
- Be inclusive. Provide substantive information for the parents and community members who will "read only" at first and need to be coaxed to participate.
- Use electronic tools to sustain relationships. Electronic tools can be used to cultivate and nurture relationships formed elsewhere.
- Don't neglect face-to-face meetings. Look for opportunities to organize occasional face-to-face meetings to reinforce or extend online activities.
- Create value. Whether they're sponsors of simple online forums or partners in large community networks, school leaders should have the goal of making the electronic communities so valuable that they become indispensable for the work of the community.
- Identify and address training needs. After determining the array of CMC tools the district will deploy in its public engagement program, members of the planning team should identify what potential users—teachers, building administrators, board members, students, and members of the public—should know and be able to do in order to participate in the electronic community's activities. Various media—printed notices, ads in local media, public service announcements, e-mail—can be used to publicize the project, provide basic instructions, or point users to online guides. Of course, teachers and school staff who are involved in online interactive exchanges with parents through homework help sites, online gradebooks, and the like will probably need more extensive professional development.
- Make available easily accessible help lines and other forms of technical support to members of the electronic community. Whenever possible, supplement online help with warm bodies accessible by phone.
- Conduct research early in the planning process to identify potential pitfalls. Visit other schools and districts that currently participate in electronic communities to learn from their experiences.
- Do not expect immediate results, and allow enough time for users to develop an online culture. Five years is a reasonable time frame for large-scale technology adoption (Bailey & Lumley, 1997; Bellingham Schools, 1997a; Office of Technology Assessment, 1995; Smith, 1999). According to Burgstahler & Swift (1996), building an electronic community is not an immediate feat. It is an evolutionary process, and users must be ready to use the system before implementation will be successful. Promote user acceptance by starting with a small core of adopters who will spread information and encourage and teach others.
- Take advantage of meetings and face-to-face forums and local gathrings to publicize the electronic community and recruit new members. Make sure e-mail addresses, bulletin board log-ins, and URLs appear on school and district materials. Target the decision makers within organizations for marketing efforts. Use video or other multimedia presentations—possibly created by students or school staff— to introduce and demonstrate the electronic community. An Internet festival can be held in a community center and advertised throughout the schools and in local media.

- Include community outreach needs in multiyear technology plans. Make sure that potential expansion and development of new structures and designs are not limited by hardware, software, or service provider capabilities or contracts (Blacksburg Electronic Village, 1997; Burgstahler & Swift, 1996; Gamse & Grunwald, 1997; Kellogg, 1996).

Advantages of electronic communities

- In electronic communication, race, gender, personal appearance, disabilities, economic status, and hierarchy are generally not obvious. This relative anonymity may make it easier for people to share their views, ask questions, or request information because certain traditional barriers to open communication among diverse voices are diminished.
- Electronic communications can offer a meaningful option for parents and community members who are shy or who don't care for face-to-face meetings; those whose schedule or transportation situation limits visits to the school campus; or those who have health problems or family obligations that interfere with attendance at meetings.
- Participating in online forums and receiving information and assistance from online sources help all involved increase their familiarity with the power, as well as the mechanics, of computer-mediated communication technologies. Greater understanding and appreciation of the uses and benefits of CMC technologies build community support for technology funding and curricular initiatives.

Barriers to successful implementation of electronic communities

- The greatest barrier to success in the development of electronic communities has been lack of administrative support. Strong leadership and support are critical elements in the planning and implementation of technology initiatives. Principals who are informed and comfortable with technology play key roles in the implementation of change. Administrators who use technology and show enthusiasm for it can bring teachers and other educational leaders into the realm of new technological innovations such as electronic communities (Carter, 2000a; Cooley, 1998; Haycock, 1999; Lowe and Vespestad, 1999; Lumley & Bailey, 1997; Nichols, 1999; Ritchie, 1996; Stripling, 1999).
- Lack of clear direction is often a barrier to successful integration of technology-based innovations in the overall education program. School leaders should be clear about what they want from enhanced parent and community engagement and consider, in advance, appropriate mechanisms for responding to the voices of parents and the general public. It is important that administrators and board members share a vision of what technology innovations will bring to the district. Administrators and board members need to understand what the prospective changes will mean and the importance of planning and budgeting for needed resources—including staff development, infrastructure, and technical support (Bailey & Lumley, 1997).
- Prospects for success are slimmer when parents and community members who are not parents are not included in district teams that consider and plan technology-based outreach efforts. The perspectives of the constituencies to be reached are vital in identifying what issues and concerns are important to the

local community. Also, community representatives can be enthusiastic ambassadors for outreach initiatives. Administrators, teachers, school staff, parents, students, and community leaders all need to be involved in the effort, encouraged to share goals and interests, and invited to work together to build electronic communities.

- Limited access to computers and the Internet among parents and community members obviously limits the reach of school-sponsored electronic outreach activities. Failure to understand and take into account the extent of the local digital divide may result in the electronic community becoming an agent of exclusion rather than inclusion (Bracey, 1999). Identify and publicize free access points within the community (see sidebar, Locate Free Computer and Internet Access in Your Community).

Locate Free Computer and Internet Access in Your Community

Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet)

CTCNet is a network of more than 600 community technology centers where people in low-income communities gain access to computers and computer-related technology, such as the Internet. The online CTCNet directory is organized by state and provides location and contact information, including live links to center Web sites. CTCNet is a nonprofit organization. Since its beginning in 1990, the organization has been supported by a number of federal, nonprofit, and corporate sources.

CTCNet
372 Broadway Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
tel. 617-354-0825
fax. 617-812-5368
http://www.ctcnet.org/

ConnectNet

ConnectNet is a public awareness and information resource supported by the Benton Foundation's Digital Divide Network (http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org) and other philanthropic and corporate partners. The ConnectNet Web site provides access to a user-friendly, searchable database of more than 20,000 free technology sites nationwide. For those who lack computer or Web access, a toll-free telephone number (866-583-1234) also connects users to information about sites. ConnectNet's directory and its Spanish counterpart, Conectado, are searchable by zip code. The database listings are linked to software programs that deliver detailed maps showing the location of free access points within a given area. (http://www.connectnet.org/english/)

Conclusion

Aside from helping to enhance learning in the schools, electronic communities can provide a new medium for voicing public concerns and helping people feel less isolated and powerless. Motivated to participate in electronic communities by an educational purpose, participants increase their familiarity and comfort level with computers and the online environment, which can, in turn, boost their functional literacy in the Information Age. Electronic communities have become a complementary part of the traditional school setting (Schuler, Denton & Denton, 1998). They provide a way for schools and communities to communicate, and communication often serves as the catalyst for community involvement in schools (Snyder & Snyder, 1996).

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Chapter

Resources

This section lists resources that school leaders may use to acquire more information about family and community involvement in schools and technology-based tools to assist in developing and implementing involvement programs. Print and electronic resources are cited, as well as organizations, programs, and agencies. URLs were active when this list was compiled.

Chapter 1
Engaging Families and Communities in the Work of Schools: Issues and Technology-based Tools

Communicating with the Public: A Guide for School Leaders
Anne Meek. 1999. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
http://www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/meek99toc.html

In this handbook, the author emphasizes baseline communications, "the ongoing efforts initiated by schools to meet the information needs of parents and the community at large, to strengthen the partnerships of parents and schools, to promote school activities and events, to explain school programs and school benefits, to enhance the image of the schools, and ultimately to promote support for education in the community." Extracts from several chapters and sections are available online.

The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement
Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. 2000. Alexandria, Va.: National School Boards Association.

This report profiles 15 school district efforts to boost student achievement through community engagement. Board members, superintendents, and other district leaders submitted information and participated in interviews and surveys. The profiles are supplemented by a synthesis of findings and a resource section.

Connecting School and Community through Technology
The Link 20(4). 2001.
http://www.ael.org/link/v20n4/tech.htm

This online journal, published by the Appalachian Educational Laboratory, features profiles of several projects funded by U.S. Department of Education Challenge Grants—projects that focused on adopting or adapting technology to improve parent and community involvement in schools.

Connecting to Communities. 2000, Fall. Edutopia
http://www.glef.org/EdutopiaPDF/Fall00.pdf

Produced by the George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF), as part of the foundation's "Teaching in the Digital Age" program, this theme issue of GLEF's quarterly newsletter features articles and profiles from teachers, administrators, and other educators discussing actual family/community programs. Supplementary multimedia resources, as well as HTML versions of the theme issue articles are available on the GLEF Web site (http://www.glef.org) in the "Involved Communities" section.

Constructing School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). 1998. Naperville, Il.: NCREL.
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm

This paper focuses on ways that schools can initiate and sustain family-community-school partnerships designed to improve student learning and strengthen schools, families, and communities. An overview of research is included, with live links to related full-text documents. Guidelines on crafting family involvement programs articulate goals, action options, and implementation pitfalls and provide several illustrative cases of family involvement programs.

Data, Public Engagement and Strategic Communications
Chap. 3 in *Using Data to Improve Schools: What's Working*. American Association of School Administrators (AASA). 2001. Arlington, Va.: AASA.
http://www.aasa.org/cas/UsingDataToImproveSchools.pdf

While the focus of this chapter is effective communication to the public about data collected by the school district, the strategies, guidelines, and examples can be helpful to school leaders in planning and implementing community engagement programs.

Education and Community Building
Jeanne Jehl, Martin J. Blank, and Barbara McCloud. 2001. Washington, D.C:
Institute for Educational Leadership.
http://www.communityschools.org/combuild.pdf

Goals of this report include: (1) helping educators and community builders understand one another—their respective organizational cultures, concerns, philosophies, operating styles, etc.; (2) describing effective strategies and suggesting rules of engagement to guide interactions between educators and community builders; and (3) recommending future work to strengthen joint efforts.

Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches. An Idea Book.
AR 97-7022. Janie E. Funkhouser and Miriam R. Gonzales. 1997. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve/

Based on case studies of 20 successful parent involvement programs nationwide, this publication is organized around strategies for overcoming common barriers to family involvement in schools. Most of the schools featured in the book receive Title I funds.

Hand in Hand: Parents—Schools—Communities United for Kids. An Evaluation of the Mattel Children's Foundation's Hand in Hand initiative.
Michael D. Usdan. 2000. N. p.: Mattel Children's Foundation.
http://www.mattel.com/pdfs/handinhand.pdf

This report presents (1) a brief history and contextual background of the Hand in Hand program, supported by the Mattel Foundation from 1995 to 1998; (2) an evaluation of the project, which sought to encourage parent and community involvement in education; and (3) a summary of major lessons and suggestions for possible future activity. The program was designed to encourage parental and community involvement in education.

Humanizing Distributed Electronic Meetings
Peter Johnson-Lenz and Trudy Johnson-Lenz. 1995. Lake Oswego, Ore.: Awakening Technology.
http://www.awakentech.com/at/Awaken.nsf?OpenDatabase

At the core of this paper is a discussion of the three approaches suggested by the authors to make distributed electronic meetings (asynchronous) more human, connected, effective, and satisfying. The approaches are: plan at least as much as for face-to-face meetings; infuse online communication with the human touch; and bring the whole person into the meeting. This paper offers a very informative and stimulating blend of the conceptual and pragmatic issues associated with asynchronous online forums.

National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
National PTA. 1998.
http://www.pta.org/programs/invstand.htm

In 1997, the National PTA developed National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, which were widely disseminated in succeeding years. This handbook provides guidelines, action plans, and resources for operationalizing the standards. It begins with background information and a summary of research findings. Some of the checklists are available in five languages besides English.

Parent Involvement in Education: A Resource for Parents, Educators, and Communities.
Iowa Department of Education. n. d.
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00321/n00321.html

This extensive handbook reviews research that attests to the importance of parent involvement in student success, discusses the attributes of effective parent involvement programs, and provides guidelines, tools, and resources that help educators overcome common barriers.

The Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Guide
Massachusetts Department of Education. November 2000.
http://www.doe.mass.edu/schcouncil/pubs/2000/pandc.pdf

Using as a foundation the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, developed by the National PTA, the Massachusetts Parent and Community Involvement and Education Advisory Council produced statewide standards for Massachusetts public schools. This guide articulates seven parent and community involvement program standards and provides a rationale and set of indicators for each.

Pocket Guide to Teacher-Parent Engagement
National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE). 2001. Alexandria, Va.: NAPE.
http://www.partnersineducation.org/

NAPE developed the Teacher-Parent Engagement Through Partnerships initiative to provide resources to help schools and other groups develop successful and innovative teacher-parent partnerships. This brochure is offered as a "toolkit that addresses five elements critical to the development of comprehensive teacher-parent partnerships: effective communication, engaging families of diverse backgrounds in improving student success, facilitating time and access for families and educators to work together, effective school and community leadership, and professional development. Also included is a profile of Fresno Unified School District, recipient of the 2001 MetLife Foundation Teacher-Parent Engagement Through Partnerships Award.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action.
Joyce L. Epstein, Lucretia Coates, Karen C. Salinas, Mavis G. Sanders, &
Beth S. Simon. 1997. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Corwin Press.
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/manual.htm

This handbook is designed to help state, district, and school leaders organize and implement permanent programs of school, family, and community partnerships. The eight chapters provide step-by-step strategies, based on the well-known framework of six types of parent/family involvement developed by coauthor, Joyce Epstein. This is a very user-friendly guide, with lots of charts, inventories, and reproducibles.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools
211 East Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701-3281
Ph 800-476-6861
http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/

SEDL generates, collects, and disseminates information on making stronger connections among families, schools, and communities. Two recently released SEDL resources provide to educators information on the latest research on family and community connections with schools. *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections* is a synthesis report, which identifies key issues related to school, family, and community connections that must be addressed for practitioners to make effective connections. It is the first in a series of five reports and is based on a review of more than 160 publications, including research, practice, and theory. The "Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database" is a searchable database that contains brief summaries of over 140 publications. Updated regularly, the database includes recent research articles, program and practice evaluations, and theoretical publications.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work—A Staff Resource Book for Developing Home and School Partnerships
San Diego City Schools, Parent Involvement and Support Unit. 1997 (revised).
http://prod031.sandi.net/parent_inv/programs/teamwork.html

This very comprehensive and user-friendly guide contains a wealth of information and resources to help school leaders understand the value of home-school partnerships, the planning process for developing partnerships, and common barriers and suggested solutions. There are lots of checklists; survey forms for investigating school climate and parent and student needs; and lists of do's and don'ts.

U.S. Department of Education Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE)
http://pfie.gov

PFIE encourages community, business, family, and school support of parent and employee involvement in education. Resources, ideas, funding, and conferences related to family involvement in education are offered by the PFIE.

Chapter 2
Electronic Tools to Help School Boards Reach Out to Parents and Communities

Adding Discussion Forums to Your Site
Rex Baldazo. 1999.
http://www.builder.com/Servers/Threads/index.html

This is the first in a series of articles located on this site about options for adding discussion forums to Web sites. The focus is on basic issues, such as useful definitions and distinctions. For example, the author outlines the differences between live chat and Web-based forums and discusses situations in which one or the other may be more appropriate.

All for All
Wendy D. Puriefoy. 2000. *American School Board Journal*, April, 187(4), 36-41.

Overall, results of an investigation designed to gauge the public's commitment to education and the willingness of individuals to become involved in schools indicated public support, belief in the value of good schools to local communities, and a desire to get personally involved in schools. Also discussed in this article are barriers to community engagement and guiding principles for building effective public engagement programs.

The Art of Hosting Good Conversations Online
Howard Rheingold, n. d.
http://www.rheingold.com/texts/artonlinehost.html

The author's epigrammatic style adds charm and humor to this list of do's and don'ts for those who would be hosts of online forums. For example, in the section on host behavior, Rheingold says, "Remember that both civility and nastiness are contagious." He also talks about goals, characteristics of good online discussions, and qualities of good hosts.

Building Online Communities
S. Ryan. 1997.
http://builder.cnet.com/webbuilding/pages/Business/Community/index.html

This article considers the value that online communities (typically real-time chat rooms or bulletin boards) can add to an organization's Web presence. Five case studies of diverse sites are supplemented by a "how-to" section, "10 Tips for Building Online Communities" (http://www.builder.com/Business/Community/ss08.html), as well as guidelines for deciding if setting up an online community is the right move, "Will Community Work for you?" (http://www.builder.com/Business/Community/ss01.html).

Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities
Amy Jo Kim. 2000. N. p.: Peachpit Press.

Often minimal consideration is given by Web site designers and administrators to the aspect of Web-based communities covered in this book. The author looks at the "social scaffolding" (roles, rituals, features, events, and leadership) that Web communities need to grow and flourish. Chapters are devoted to each of nine principles for community building. A very useful section is devoted to policies, consisting of links to policy documents from different Web communities (e.g., rules of conduct, posting guidelines, chat etiquette and rules). Sizable excerpts from the book are available at http://www.naima.com/community/index.html, and the nine core principles

are summarized in an article, "Secrets of Successful Web Communities: 9 Timeless Design Principles for Community-Building" (http://www.naima.com/articles/webtechniques.html).

How Users Read on the Web
Jakob Nielson. 1997.
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html

This brief outline of basic "writing for the Web" rules is supplemented by a summary of findings from an investigation of the effect of improvements in writing on Web site usability. The improvements were based on specific content guidelines and yielded 124 percent better usability, according to the article.

Internet Marketing Tips
n. d.
http://www.net-sites.net/tips.htm

Twelve succinctly delivered principles for effectively promoting products, programs, issues, etc. make up this Internet marketing tip sheet. Offered by Net Sites, a Web site design and hosting firm, the advice has a business slant; nevertheless, the tips include sound and sensible information for schools using Web sites and other electronic vehicles to engage the public.

The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook
Katheryn W. Gemberling, Carl W. Smith, & Joseph Villani. 2000. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.
http://www.nsba.org/keywork/guidebook/KeyworkGuidebook.pdf

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) created the Key Work of School Boards as a framework for raising student achievement through community engagement. This guidebook provides concrete tools in eight "key" action areas: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

Making Online Forums Work for Community Networks
David R. Woolley. 1998.
http://thinkofit.com/webconf/afcnart.htm

Four essential elements of successful community network online forums are discussed: clear purpose, experienced hosts, interested participants, and good software.

Moderator Guidelines
Lisa Kimball. n. d.
http://tcfreenet.org/help/confdoc/modguide.html

These concise guidelines for moderating online conferences (e.g., bulletin boards, forums) are organized into five topics: initial conference structure, creating the framework, facilitating discussion, developing the group, and managing content.

Online Moderator Guidelines and Community-building Tips
Gail A. Williams. 1997.
http://www.well.com/confteam/hosting.html

This article is adapted from a manual on hosting online conferences published by The WELL, a California-based forum service. It gives practical advice on topics such as how to handle problems, sustainability, welcoming new participants, and time management.

Online Community Building Concepts
Gail Ann Williams. 1994.
http://www.well.com/~gail/community.tips.html

The author subtitles this article, "Almost Proverbs." And the 16 short guidelines Gail Williams offers do have the tone of maxims gleaned from deep experience. The list, she says, "is about attitude and approach to people rather than interface and economics."

School Boards: Rebuilding Relationships with the Public
Richard W. Riley. 2001.
http://www.iel.org/about/papers/schoolboards.pdf

Former Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley delivered this address, the first annual Jacqueline P. Danzberger Memorial Lecture, at the NSBA annual conference in March 2001. The message focused on how the major challenges facing public school education today can be resolved if schools renew their connections to local communities.

Chapter 3
Electronic Communities: Supporting Public Engagement

Blacksburg Electronic Village
http://www.bev.net/about/index.php

Begun in the early 1990s, Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) has become one of the most successful and influential electronic community networks in the country. BEV extends the concept of community service beyond its local boundaries through its extensive collection of online resources, which can be downloaded without charge, and its schedule of training and technical assistance services. The "digital library" section of the site offers development manuals, summaries of research on BEV's impact, and several papers that deal with theoretical, conceptual, and practical issues surrounding community networks.

CMC Studies Center
http://www.december.com/cmc/study/center.html

From this site, scholars and practitioners can access a comprehensive and eclectic collection of information sources about the Internet and computer-mediated communication.

Seven Steps to Building Electronic Communities
Philippa Gamse and Terry Grunwald. 1997.
http://www.totalnetval.com/7-steps.htm.

This document provides a clear, practical, and easy-to-use set of guidelines to help managers of electronic bulletin boards and other kinds of computer networks assess their organization's readiness to network, identify appropriate activities to incorporate, and determine whether to use existing systems or develop an independent network.

General Information

Getting a Public Relations Program Started
National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). n. d. Rockville, Md.: NSPRA
http://www.nspra.org/main_schoolpr.htm

NSPRA provides school communications training and services to school districts, state departments of education, regional service agencies, and state and national associations. This nuts-and-bolts guide includes samples of school public relations policies, exemplary public relations programs, and related job descriptions; NSPRA standards for school public relations plans and policies; and an outline of a four-step process for creating an exemplary public relations program.

Institute for Responsive Education (IRE)
Northeastern University
21 Lake Hall
Boston, MA 02115
ph 617-373-2595
http://www.responsiveeducation.org

IRE provides information, resources, and technical assistance that encourages and supports the development of school-family-community partnerships.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
ph 703-359-8973
fax 703-359-0972
http://www.ncpie.org

This coalition of education, community, public service, and advocacy organizations works to create meaningful family-school partnerships in all American schools. NCPIE serves as a clearinghouse for resources created by member organizations.

Reconnecting Communities and Schools Initiative
Harwood Institute for Public Innovation
4915 St. Elmo Ave., Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814
ph 301-656-3669
thi@theharwoodinstitute.ord
http://www.theharwoodinstitute.org

The goal of this initiative is to reestablish and strengthen the relationship between America's communities and public schools. Communities involved in the initiative participate in an extended process focused on community engagement, taking public action, and sustaining and accountability. The Harwood Institute offers a collection of tools designed to be used as starting points for working on the relationship between schools and communities: Listening Educator Kit, Community Conversation Kit, Professionalism Bias Barometer, and Generating a New Public Story.

The resources listed in this section were compiled by Ismat Abdal-Haqq, education technology publication manager at NSBA and editor of Technology Leadership News.

Appendix

Parent Involvement Policy Statement

San Diego City Schools, Ca.

The Board of Education recognizes the necessity and value of parent involvement to support student success and academic achievement. In order to assure collaborative partnerships among schools, parents, and the community, the board, working through the administration, is committed to:

- involving parents as partners in school governance, including shared decision making.
- establishing effective two-way communication with all parents, respecting the diversity and differing needs of families.
- developing strategies and programmatic structures at schools to empower parents to participate actively in their children's education.
- providing support and coordination for school staff and parents to implement and sustain meaningful parent involvement from kindergarten through grade twelve.
- utilizing schools to connect students and families with community resources that provide educational enrichment and support.

Reprinted with permission from *Team Work Makes the Dream Work—Staff Resource Book for Developing Home School Partnerships*. 1997. San Diego City Schools, Task Force, Parent Involvement Department and District Advisory Committee. http://prod031.sandi.net/parent_inv/programs/teamwork.html

Appendix

One District's Approach to Building a Better Web Site

Sylvia Knapp
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (N.C.)

These days, Web site management problems surface faster than districts can develop regulation policies. For this reason the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS; http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/) in North Carolina takes a conservative stance when publishing information on its site or when using new features such as bulletin boards, chat rooms, and e-mail exchanges. We follow a Web development process that's designed to protect our staff, our students, and our district's image.

Our site is composed of two parts—the general district information portion and the district's 140 individual school Web sites. We are moving some general information sections to our newly developed intranet, designed for CMS employees only. Moving staff contact information, documents relating to departmental operations, and other items of interest only to staff will allow us to further safeguard personal employee information and prevent "information overload" on our public site.

Our public Web site displays important current district news headlines on the front page and maintains an archive of all district news stories in a separate section. Headlines are maintained by the CMS Public Information Department to ensure all stories are factually correct and appear in an appropriate order of importance. Each school has a staff member who acts as the "key communicator" and is responsible for submitting newsworthy items directly to our department. Items are checked for accuracy, then cleared for public release via the Internet, intranet, newspapers, TV, or radio stations, as appropriate. This system allows us to maintain factual consistency in all news releases.

Guiding Web development

Individual schools and departments follow specific development guidelines as well. Again, the safety of the students and staff and the preservation of the district's image are of paramount importance. The process of guiding Web development begins anew each new school year when we request school principals and department directors to select a site webmaster and a staff member responsible for answering e-mail addressed to that school or department. Next, we hold a general meeting and give each webmaster:

- A password and user ID for a secured section on one of our Web servers.
- Guidance and rationale for maintaining the security of the assigned password/user ID. (Each webmaster agrees to notify the telecommunications staff immediately if, for any reason, that security is comprised. If the webmaster suspects a problem, that school or department is immediately assigned a new password.)

- A specific e-mail account for each school or department and guidance for answering the public's e-mail requests. (We prefer to have the school's official e-mail address be the only one displayed prominently on the Web site. Some schools have opted to post teacher e-mail addresses as well, but we request that these addresses be the ones assigned by CMS and not personal e-mail addresses.)
- A webmaster notebook with steps for planning and implementing a Web site, copyright guidelines, resources for programming assistance, graphics advice, and contact information for personal assistance.
- Parent/guardian permission forms to allow the use of student pictures and work. (We do request that student names not be displayed with student pictures; however, parents may give consent when they wish to have their child's picture and name displayed together. This has been an issue with award recognitions or sporting event displays.)
- Staff permission forms. (Pictures and personal information are not displayed without permission.)

We support our webmaster groups by holding additional meetings to explain and discuss various Internet issues. To help clarify Internet-related copyright problems, for example, we invited an attorney who specializes in Internet communication to speak to the group.

Other areas of concern

Linking to outside Web sites is another area of concern. Schools must print a disclaimer stating that "every reasonable attempt" has been made to ensure Web pages are educationally safe and do not contain links to materials that violate the district's acceptable-use policy.

Only educational, curriculum-related Web sites are considered for links. Schools are not permitted to link to student Web sites for any reason—the temptation for young people to be "creative" is simply too great! Students help develop Web sites for several of our schools but do not receive access to the servers. Displays are developed under faculty supervision and must be submitted to the school webmaster for approval.

Staff members who want to post Web information must work with the school's official webmaster. Staff Web displays must follow the required guidelines, then be given to the official school or department webmaster for posting. All proposed Web displays are approved by the school's principal or the department's director before posting.

Student use of e-mail remains a potential safety issue. CMS has established "generic" e-mail addresses, as needed, for curriculum-related projects. Students in Ms. Smith's fifth-grade class, for example, compose letters to pen pals offline, then send them via a "smithproject@ schooldistrict.k12.us" e-mail address. The teacher oversees the project by receiving and reviewing all incoming and outgoing e-mails.

Web site bulletin boards, which are used to survey parents and students or post remarks from alumni, also have caused problems. The available software offers little or no control over what is displayed. We will allow bulletin board displays only if a staff member reviews entries before they are posted and makes sure e-mail addresses are not posted. We do not post e-mail addresses for a student under any circumstances.

Chat sessions are permitted only under very specific and limited situations. They must be monitored by a faculty member and must guarantee no e-mail addresses or other personal contact information will be exchanged. Each session has a specific time limit.

These regulations have allowed individual schools and departments to develop their own Web presence—and helped us ensure the safety of students and staff.

Sylvia Knapp is an external communications specialist with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools public (N.C.) information department.

Reprinted with permission from *Electronic School*, September 2001.
http://www.electronic-school.com/2001/09/0901betterwebsite.html

Appendix 3

School Web Sites and Freedom of Expression Issues

The following hypotheticals have been excerpted from Legal Issues & Education Technology: A School Leaders Guide, Second Edition (Appendix 2), *published by NSBA in 2001. All are based on actual, documented situations and occurrences.*

Freedom of Expression

Roosevelt High has an open guest book for people to share what they think of the school programs and Web site. The school district invites community participation on its Web site with chat rooms, guest books, and bulletin boards. The school board has proclaimed that it wants the school district's Web site to be as open for expression as a school board meeting. Members welcome input on their Web site about curriculum, important political issues related to education, and anything that the community considers important with regard to education.

Sophomore Joe Hearst prints an underground newspaper and distributes it at school. He enjoys criticizing various things about the school, using four-letter words, and publishing questionable stories and poetry that include vulgar language. Since all of this is done privately by Joe, he actually has a legal right to engage in such activity on campus.

No one pays attention to Joe anymore. He therefore posts his newsletter on the district Web site bulletin board. To make sure people pay attention, he now writes shameful articles about which teachers are drunks and have driving under the influence (DUI) charges now or in the past. He makes allegations about which teachers cheat on their spouses and with whom and when, and which teachers have made inappropriate advances to students. Joe's articles are widely read and have popularized the district Web site considerably. Joe is even dreaming of a career with one of the Hollywood gossip tabloids.

Can the district keep Joe's material off its Web site?

Answer:

Under First Amendment freedom of expression law, when a school opens a forum (like the Web site in this scenario) to unrestricted public expression, it has difficulty thereafter controlling the content or who has access to that forum. Roosevelt High has opened its Web site to the community to discuss its schools. Joe can argue that he is discussing the community schools by revealing which teachers are fit examples for youth. With an open forum Web site, a court would probably allow Joe to continue linking his underground to the school's Web site. (See generally *Board of Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, 109 S.Ct. 3240 (1990) and *Planned Parenthood of Southern Nevada, Inc. v. Clark County School Dist.*, 941 F.2d 817 (1991). Both cases discuss the issue of school forums.)

Policy solutions:

The school could eliminate expression such as Joe's in two main ways. It could prevent the Web site forum from being used in certain ways and discontinue its use as a community forum for discussion on education issues. The district could also adopt a school district-related Web site policy that designates the site as a "closed forum," for district use only, to transmit information to the public.

Political Speech

Local activist Bull Loney is running for the school board. He connects his Web site to the Roosevelt Web site to engage in political debate about the school board election. Many consider his statements to be reactionary and racist. He decries the shameful new religion of secular humanism being taught in our schools and make scurrilous remarks about the abilities of various school employees.

Now what?

Answer:

If the Web site provides an open forum for expression, it's the cyberage equivalent of a soap box in a park. Therefore, even the most objectionable individuals can have their say.

Policy solution:

The school could eliminate expression such as Bull's in three ways. (1) It could close the Web site forum to certain uses and discontinue its use as a community forum for discussion on education issues. (2) It could adopt a school district-related Web site policy that designates the site as a "closed forum," for district use only, to transmit information to the public. (3) The district could create a service mark for the school name so that anyone using the school's name as an identifier (such as the name of a link or in the Web page name itself) could be required to seek permission from the district or cease using the school name in identifying a site or link.

Religion and Prayer in Cyberspace—How are schools linked?

The Roosevelt High School Mergens club (Christian prayer club) begins posting material on the school Web site too. Contrary to what one might expect, it is one of the most visited connections—not because of its religious content, but because of it's "Sinner of the Week" column. Club members vote on which teacher or student was the biggest sinner during the previous week, write about which commandment was broken, and give details on the actions that the sinner took in breaking the commandment.

Would the district have a problem prohibiting this column?

Answer:

Again, an open forum creates the opportunity for anyone to post material on the Web site. Since schools must be neutral toward religion, they may not restrict their own Mergens prayer club from posting information on the Web site. (See *Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, 109 S.Ct. 3240 (1990).

NSBA Education Technology Publications

Publications from the National School Boards Association's ITTE: Education Technology Programs Department help education leaders meet the challenges of applying technology in schools. Each Technology Leadership Network district receives complimentary copies of new volumes at the time of publication and special discounts on additional purchases. A full publications brochure is available from ITTE. Tables of contents can be viewed at www.nsba.org/itte/publicat.html, as well as selected articles from the newsletter, *Technology Leadership News* (http://www.nsba.org/itte/insiders.html). More recent publications include:

Books and Reports

New! Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology (2002) Find out how schools and districts are using technology to reach out and engage parents and community members in making schools work better for students. Topics include: electronic tools for school boards; planning, implementing, and maintaining a parent and community engagement program; Web sites that work; and legal issues related to computer-based outreach strategies. Also includes profiles of parent and community outreach efforts by schools and extensive resources. Softbound, 100 pages, ISBN 0-88364-256-5. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-151-44

Technology Professional Development for P - 12 Educators (2001) Get help planning, implementing, and assessing technology-related professional development for teachers and administrators in your district. This practical, user-friendly guide gives you research-based frameworks for designing staff development programs that are linked to student learning goals, incorporate new technology standards, and reflect adult learning theory. Funding strategies and sources, program profiles, and helpful resources are included. Softbound, 101 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-232-8. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-149-44

Legal Issues & Education Technology: A School Leader's Guide, 2nd Edition (2001) Written by members of NSBA's Council of School Attorneys (COSA), this guide emphasizes preventive strategies and knowledge school leaders need to avoid costly, disruptive litigation as they attempt to successfully blend various technologies into the instructional and administrative work of schools. Contents reflect recent legislation and court decisions and are presented in accessible format and language. Topics include: filters; legal requirements for accessible Web design and ergonomically sound facilities; student and staff privacy rights; COPPA, CIPA, FERPA, ADA compliance issues and updates; copyright; acceptable use policies; off-site data storage policies; commercial agreements with e-businesses; open-meeting "sunshine" laws; and more. Softbound, 146 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-247-6. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-150-44

Plans & Policies for Technology in Education: A Compendium, 2nd Edition (2000) Actual district technology plans illustrate practical solutions school technology leaders have taken to address persistent problems in education technology integration. The second edition supplements the resources included in the first edition of *Plans & Policies*, featuring 25 new district plans and updated information on trends and issues. The guide features a user-friendly six-step planning model, articulates a conceptual framework for technology

planning, offers nuts-and-bolts guidelines for developing action plans, and provides extensive examples and discussion of acceptable use policies, facilities management, staff development, curriculum integration, and other critical topics. Also included are abundant Internet and other resources for technology planners. Softbound, 238 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-236-0. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-147-44

Models of Success: Case Studies of Technology in Schools (1999) In this exciting collection of case studies, planning and policy documents appear alongside narratives of what 20 school districts have achieved with technology. Chapters divide the studies according to how education leaders have used technology to support student achievement, technology infrastructure, professional development, and community-wide learning. Developed with support from Microsoft Corporation, the models, documents, contacts, and guidance help readers construct and refine their own success stories. Softbound, 232 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-226-3. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-146-44

Leader's Guide to Education Technology (1998) Research, analysis, and recommendations included in this volume help you make sound technology decisions about student achievement, educational equity, and work force preparedness. You'll find empirical evidence of how technology makes a difference in teaching and learning, as well as examples of the challenges schools face and sample questions to ask when considering technology planning. A good guide to give others who need to "get on board" the school improvement effort, it is published by the EDvancenet project—a partnership of the National School Boards Foundation, the Consortium for School Networking, and MCI WorldCom—and is also available at www.cosn.org/edvancenet. Softbound, 24 pages. $10 ($8 for TLN members) Order # 03-144-44

Technology & School Design: Creating Spaces for Learning (1998) This essential guide will help you plan and design or remodel school buildings, hire skilled architects and technology consultants, and work to create effective learning spaces. Written by leading school architects and technology consultants, it will be instrumental as you develop technology plans and make upgrades to your school and district infrastructure. Softbound, 122 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-220-4. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order # 03-143-44

Investing in School Technology: Strategies to Meet the Funding Challenge/School Leader's Version (1997) Learn more sophisticated costing and budgeting techniques to finance technology in your school district. Supported by Newcourt Credit Group and based on a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, the "School Leader's Version" also supplies a glossary and information on additional funding sources. Softbound, 85 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-214-X. $25 ($20 for TLN members) Order# 03-140-44

Technology for Students with Disabilities: A Decision Maker's Resource Guide (1997) Technology is an essential ally in helping students who have learning problems, major cognitive disabilities, or physical disabilities. This guide offers strategies for technology implementation to improve curriculum, assessment, and administration. Readers find assistance in assessing their needs; choosing and funding technology; and creating policy frameworks, long-range technology plans, and due process procedures. Relevant federal documents are reprinted along with an extensive resource list (also available at www.nsba.org/itte). Published by NSBA and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. Softbound, 103 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-207-7. $25 ($20 for TLN members) Order# 03-138-44

Education Leadership Toolkit: A Desktop Companion (1997) This is a concise introduction to many of the issues education leaders face as they integrate technology into their districts' activities and operations. Designed to prompt discussion and exploration, the *Desktop Companion* is divided into scenarios with questions to consider, followed by tips and resources for developing an approach to navigating the wealth of material available on the Education Leadership Toolkit Web site at www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit. Softbound, 32 pages. $10 ($8 for TLN members) Order# 03-142-44

Leadership & Technology: What School Board Members Need to Know (1995) To ask the right questions and make appropriate policy decisions, school board members need to consider and understand the wide array of technology-related issues that are treated here in a discussion-guide format. Also find a step-by-step guide to technology planning, advice about the board's relationship to administrators and the district's technology planning committee, a glossary of terms, and a bibliography. Softbound, 194 pages, ISBN: 0-88364-196-8. $35 ($28 for TLN members) Order# 03-135-44

Newsletter

Technology Leadership News is an eight-page newsletter published nine times a year as a benefit of membership in NSBA's Technology Leadership Network (TLN). The superintendent and 11 additional designated district staff receive subscriptions. TLN members may order additional subscriptions at 50% off the regular price. Members may also access the newsletter at the ITTE Web site using the membership user name and pass code. This timely newsletter about education technology issues and opportunities is available to individuals and organizations outside the Network at an annual subscription rate of $100. ISSN: 1098-657X Order# 03-119-44

To Order:

To order publications or for more information, call the NSBA Distribution Center at 1-800-706-6722, or order online at http://www.nsba.org/publications.htm

May 2002

Connecting Schools and Communities through Technology: A School Leader's Guide

Find out how schools and districts are using technology to reach out and engage parents and community members in making schools work better for students. Topics include: electronic tools for school boards; planning, implementing, and maintaining a parent and community engagement program; Web sites that work; and legal issues related to computer-based outreach strategies. Also includes extensive resources and profiles of parent and community outreach efforts by schools.

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FAX: 703-683-7590

URL: www.nsba.org
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